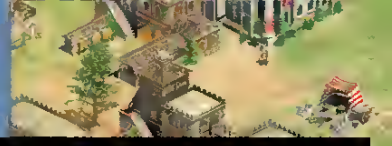
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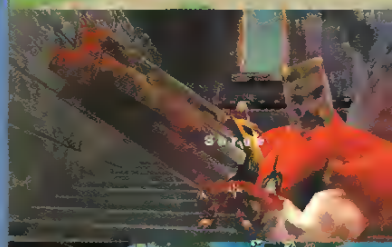
Can the creator of *Total Annihilation* take on Blizzard's epic? Exclusive preview!



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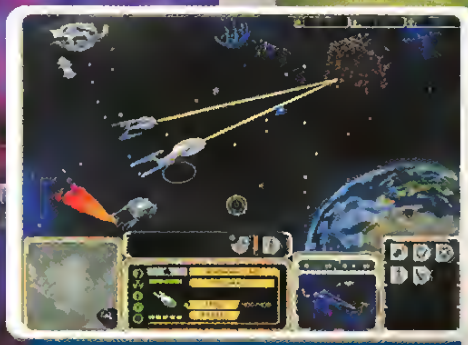
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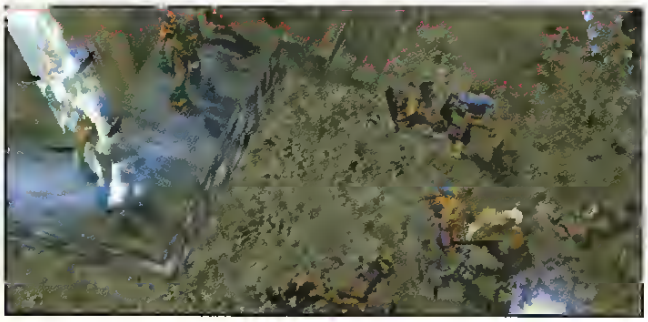
THE SIXTH ANNUAL PC GAMER AWARDS



Cover Story

45 It's that time of year again, when developers everywhere get tense with anticipation, waiting to find out if their game was worthy of a coveted *PC Gamer* annual award. It wasn't easy — we struggled, we argued, we even threw Whitta through the conference room window in disgust — but in the end, we're pleased to announce what we feel is the cream of the crop from the year that was. Join us as we honor gaming's best.

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Chris Taylor's Dungeon Siege: The Best of Both Worlds

68 Whatever happened to Chris Taylor, the man responsible for the blockbusting *Total Annihilation*? Did he take his profits and retire to a deserted island to spend the rest of his days lezily sipping on margeritas? No! He's been working overtime on *Dungeon Siege*, a roleplaying game that may even give the vaunted *Diablo II* a run for its money, and we've got the first in-depth look.

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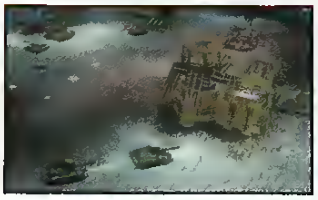
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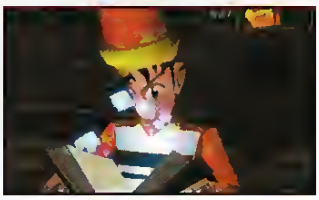
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Put your thinking caps on es you explore the new and bizarre 3D world of Harry...um, Simon the Sorcerer.

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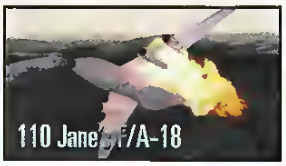
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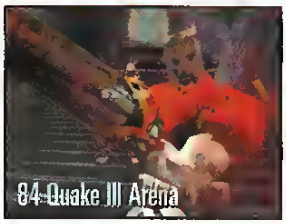
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129 Greg celebrates the fact that the world as we know it did not end upon reaching Y2K, and also talks about the latest 3D accelerators to hit the shelves from Creative, Diamond (S3), and ATI. Plus, don't forget to take a look at our reviews for Karna's Razer BoomSlang and Altec Lansing's new speakers.

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Letter from the Ed.



Why We Are Always Right

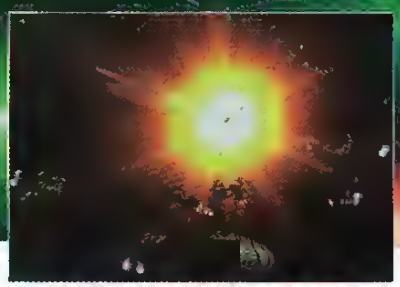
Why? Oh, I'll tell you why! Because opinion is subjective, and we're entitled to ours es much es anybody else around here! This is Americe, baby, end as a great Americen president (well, e mede-up one, at least) once said, "You went free speech? Let's see you acknowledge a man who's standing center stege end edvoceting, at the top of his lungs, that which you would spend a lifetime opposing at the top of yours."

Okay, okay, Gez...celm down. Why so defensive? Meybe it's because I know that our ennual ewards issue elways precedes a huge influx of reader mail demending to know who the hell we think we ere, awarding THIS to THAT when it should've been given to THIS, etc. Alongside our occesionel Best 50 Gemes of All Time countdown, it's elweys our most contentious issue, and so I thought I'd let loose a little pre-emptive tirede.

There's just enough room left to sey congrats to Jason Rochwerger of Teaneck, NJ, who was the first person to E-mail me with the correct answer to last month's quote: it was from the illustrious British sitcom "Fewlty Towers". Anybody who'd like to win a copy of...ooh, let's see...*Planescape: Torment*, cen do so by being the first to E-meil *gary@pcgamer.com* with the neme of the fictionel president who provided the part of the speech quoted in the text ebove. G'luck....

Gary Whitta, Editor-in-Chief

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AND GOD SAID, "LET THERE BE DEMOS..."

...AND THERE WERE DEMOS. AND GOD SAW THAT THE DEMOS WERE GOOD.

Hallelujah, brothers and sisters! Consider our little niche in the universe blessed with gaming goodness. We have ten marvelous, brand new, playable demos for you this month. To top things off, we have a full *Allegiance* beta that will give you a hands-on peek at where massively multiplayer online gaming is headed. For those who *still* haven't downloaded it, we also have *Quake III Arena* from the guys who invented deathmatch, along with bits from *Interstate '82*, *Star Trek*, *Antietam!*, and a surprisingly fun *Lego Racers* game. Can I get an Amen?

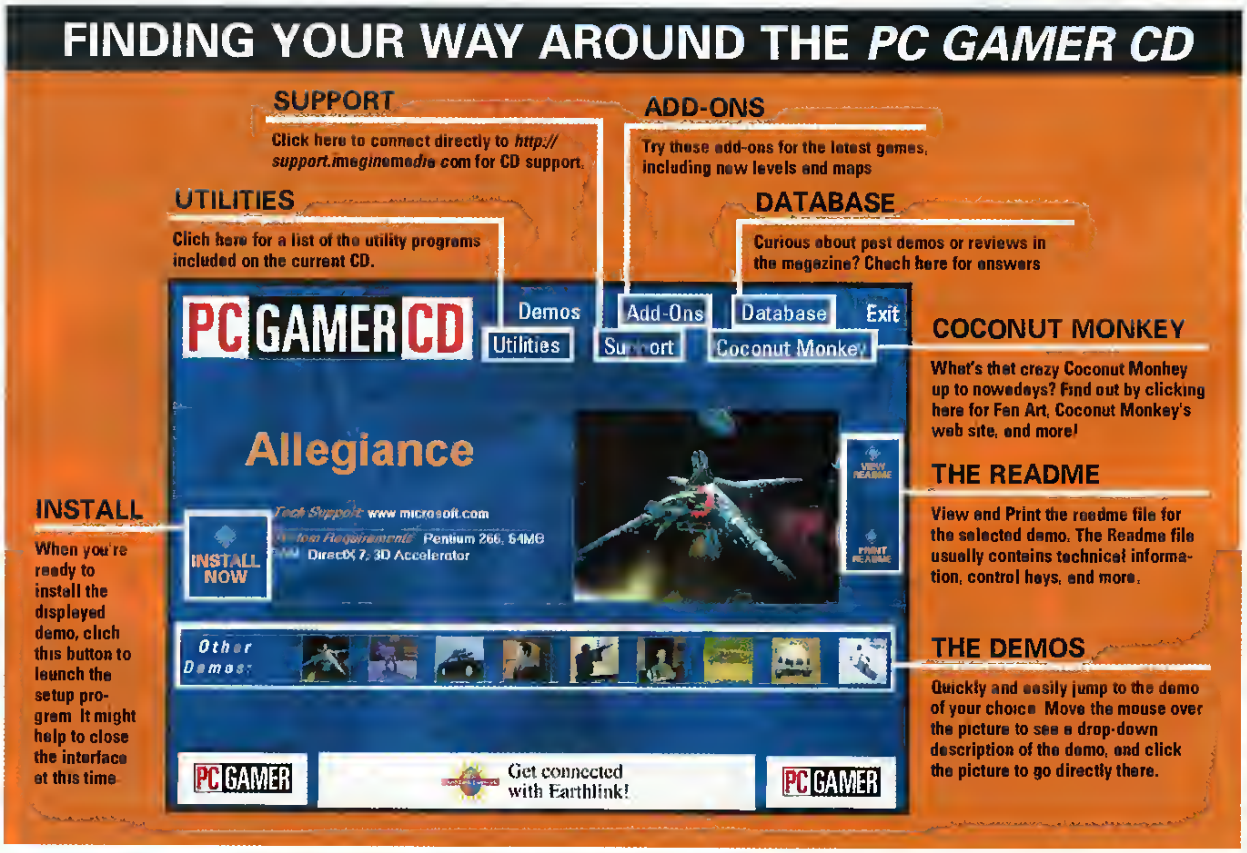
To enjoy the demos, just slide *The CD* into your CD-ROM drive and wait for the handsome new interface to appear. Choose a game, read the README, and launch the install. It's that simple.

Unfortunately, we can't provide technical support for the games contained on the disc. However, if the disc itself is scratched or defective, you can order a replacement from *http://support.imaginemedia.com*.

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FINDING YOUR WAY AROUND THE *PC GAMER CD*



www.DailyRadar.com

ALLEGIANCE

EXCLUSIVE PCG 2000

- INSTALL: \Allegiance\Setup.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: www.microsoft.com/games/
- CATEGORY: Multiplayer Space Shooter
- COMPANY: Microsoft
- REQUIRED: Pentium 266, 64MB RAM, DirectX 7, 3D accelerator

Come and get it, folks. This is a full beta of Microsoft's new online massively multiplayer space shooter. Here's how it works. Install the software. If you don't have a free account at The Zone, you will be prompted to sign up. Once that's taken care of, launch the game and follow the menus. You may be required to download an update. Train, and then join a game in progress.

This is a *time-limited* beta. It will span one month, from February 5 through March 8. Only 10,000 users can sign up per week, and users can play for no longer than one full week. The upside of all this is that you will be playing the full game, not some scrawny demo. The training missions will continue to work after the beta has expired.

The retail version will be on shelves around March 15! Keep an eye out.



Incredible graphics in a massively multiplayer universe? And they said it couldn't be done.

INTERSTATE '82

- INSTALL: \i82\i82demo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: (310) 255-2050
- CATEGORY: Racing/Action
- COMPANY: Activision
- REQUIRED: Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7, 3D accelerator

Remember Groove Champion, hero vigilante of *Interstate '76*? Well, he's not doing so well. In fact, all that's known is that his trailer was knocked over by a couple of bomb-toting baddies, and now it's up to his little sister and Taurus to track him down and pay some revenge...1980s style.

The feel of *Interstate '82* has changed substantially since its predecessor. The hardware-accelerated graphics bring a new level of detail. In this demo you will slug it out in the streets of a life-size city, as well as venture off into the barren, hilly desert.

Also new to the game is the ability to jump out of your car and hijack another one. Is your vehicle nearly toasted? Want to try out some new weapons? Just hop behind the wheel of that sporty Corvette at the gas station. Just be sure to take cover — on foot is when you're most vulnerable.



You get to blow things up on the streets of Las Vegas. What more could you ask for?

QUAKE III ARENA

- INSTALL: \Q3Arena\Q3ADemo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: (310) 255-2050
- CATEGORY: First Person Action
- COMPANY: Activision
- REQUIRED: Pentium 266, 64MB RAM, DirectX 7, 3D accelerator

It's time for the third and final incarnation of *Quake*, the definitive deathmatch experience. Here we have four complete maps from the full game, along with six amazing bots, each with their own unique personality quirks. And if you heard that *Quake III Arena* wasn't a single-player game, don't believe the hype. These bots do pack a punch.

Of course, at its core, *Quake* is and always has been a multiplayer deathmatch game. Take this demo online to test your mad skillz, or, even better, if you're hooked up with a home or office LAN you can hear the shrill cries of your friends live and in person.

The pertinent question at hand: is *Quake III Arena* better than *Unreal Tournament*? You'd be hard-pressed to find a unanimous consensus anywhere in our office, so it's up to you to decide for yourself, make a web site, and inform the entire world of the right answer.



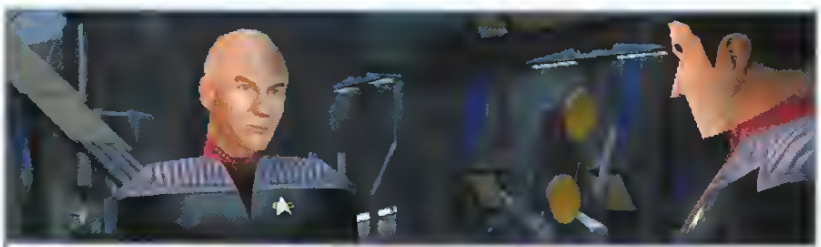
Is *QIII* better than *Unreal Tournament*? Many argue that it has an advantage in the beauty department.

STAR TREK: HIDDEN EVIL

- INSTALL: \StarTrek\hiddenevil.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: (310) 255-2050
- CATEGORY: Adventure
- COMPANY: Activision
- REQUIRED: Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

The life of an ensign in Starfleet more often leads to a cold death than it does to a promotion to duty officer. This is because they are expendable, often without a first name. But surely you can prove the rank of Ensign worthy of better attention. Surely you can get it done.

When a routine archaeological exercise on a strange planet goes horribly awry, you become the only one who can rescue Captain Picard and Lieutenant Data from deadly lasers and hostile invisible aliens. Impossible? Perhaps, but there is no alternative.



In this latest Star Trek game, you'll find Captain Picard rendered in real-time in all his bald goodness.

While the demo is relatively short, the cherry on top is a remarkable ditty sung by your favorite android. That silly robot has more soul than Billie Holiday.

SWAT 3: CLOSE QUARTERS BATTLE

- INSTALL: \Swat3\swat3demo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: (800) 757-7707
- CATEGORY: Action/Strategy
- COMPANY: Sierra
- REQUIRED: Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

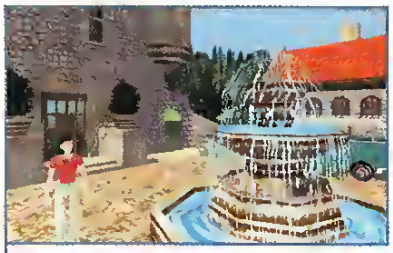
Rainbow Six fans beware: there is a new kid on the block, and he's one smart bully. It's called *SWAT 3: Close Quarters Battle*, and here is your chance to get acquainted.

A Turkish ambassador, Jemil Kemal, has been kidnapped. It is believed that he is being held hostage at an export shop in downtown Los Angeles called the River Tigris, a known hideout for a group of terrorist freedom fighters. It is up to you and your squad of elite SWAT personnel to get him out and capture the head bad guy.

The interface is a great improvement over the competition. If you want your squad to open a door or search a particular area, just point your mouse toward it and choose from the list of commands on the left side of the screen. Just be cautious! Like in real life, one bullet kills in this game, and those automatic rifles toss out seven hundrad a minute.



Normally, we find interesting trinkets in export stores. Today, we find terrorists. Take 'em out



Sierra's new engine allows the player to position the camera just about anywhere.

GABRIEL KNIGHT 3: BLOOD OF THE SACRED, BLOOD OF THE DAMNED

- INSTALL: \Gk3\gabe3dem.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: (800) 757-7707
- CATEGORY: Adventure
- COMPANY: Sierra
- REQUIRED: Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

Could this game single-handedly revitalize the adventure game genre? Take a peek and judge for yourself. In this demo you play Grace Nakimura, partner of Gabriel Knight. This chapter takes place on the second day of the full game, after all the relevant set-up. Here's the scoop: Gabriel has been entrusted with the newborn son of a Prince who fears for the life of his offspring. Soon after, Gabriel completely flubs his duties as caretaker and the baby is kidnapped from under his eyes.

Now, it seems the Prince's family has always had an issue with vampires. That is, vampires have had an interest in them for centuries. It is feared that the evil bloodsuckers have abducted the baby, and the trail is followed to a small, mysterious village in France. That's where the demo comes in. Good luck!

SID MEIER'S ANTIETAM!

- INSTALL: \Antitam\Antietam_Demo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: *www.ea.com/tech_support/*
- CATEGORY: Strategy
- COMPANY: Electronic Arts
- REQUIRED: Pentium 133, 32MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

Strategy nuts, gang way. Sid Meier is in the house.

In this demo we are treated to two scenarios and three tutorials, all rendered in the same award-winning engine from *Sid Meier's Gettysburg!* If you ever wanted to relive this bloody episode of American history, here's your chance.

Need a little background? On Wednesday, September 17, 1862, 22,726 soldiers were killed or wounded in what is acknowledged as the bloodiest day of the Civil War. That was the battle of Antietam, which lasted a mere twelve hours, and ended in a tactical draw. Both sides exhausted, neither had the strength to continue the battle. Could it have gone down differently? Could a better strategy have bean implemented? Did General Lee make a bad call? The answer lies with you and this here game. Get it done, soldier.



The training missions will teech you how to maneuver regiments and call in artillery.

TEST DRIVE OFF-ROAD 3

- INSTALL: \TestDrive\tdor3demo.exe
- TECH SUPPORT: *www.tdor3.com*
- CATEGORY: Racing
- COMPANY: Infogrames
- REQUIRED: Pentium 200, 16MB RAM, DirectX 6.1

Those lucky enough to own a truck suitable for off-road terrain have probably felt the urge once or twice to jerk the steering wheel to the left, leave the safety of the pavement, and downshift into the open hills. If only it weren't for that blasted law thing.

Well, here is everyone's chance to play in the dirt just like that, with absolutely no danger of Smokey raining on the parade. The demo contains one track and five opponents to give you a little challenge. Be sure to check out the README file for the key assignments, since there isn't much of a user interface or menu screen.

For those who like a little variety, I found that restarting the game may cause your car color to change. Who needs an "options" menu with features like that?



It's a good idea to follow your opponents once around the track to get the lay of the land. Racing these guys can be quite a challenge.

www.DailyRadar.com

LEGO RACERS

- **INSTALL** \Lego\legoracers.exe
- **TECH SUPPORT** (800) 366 6062
- **CATEGORY** Racing
- **COMPANY** Lego Media
- **REQUIRED** Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 3D accelerator, DirectX 6.1

Amazingly, this one is fun for kids of all ages. You may think of LEGO toys as harmless tools of imagination thet help budding architects find their creative muse, but these innocent LEGO types get gruesomely competitiva on the track. This game packs all the punch of your average console cart racer.

While there's only one track in this demo, there are sixteen power-ups scattered around to give it spice. You can also duck into the garage and build your own LEGO driver and car from scratch. Design actuelly matters here, end it could be the difference betwaen victory and humiliation as you teke your custom hot rod up against the reigning champion: Rockat Racar! If that name doesn't send chills up your spine now, it will in the very near future.



Racing in a toy world with missiles and bombs is a LEGO maniac's paradise

BOARDER ZONE

- **INSTALL** \bzone\bzdemo.exe
- **TECH SUPPORT** *www.boarder zone.com*
- **CATEGORY** Racing
- **COMPANY** Infogrames
- **REQUIRED** Pentium 233, 32MB RAM, DirectX 7

This is the debut title from little-known Finish developars, Housemarque. If one thing can be said of the Finn programmers, they have e delightful fetish for fancy grephics. *Boarder Zone* is no exception, and this demo will give you an idea of what their engine can do.

There are two tracks included, the second being substantially shorter and dasigned to test your stunt skills. You can also play as either e mele or female character, and night/day modes are randomized. If you don't like the ambience, just restart the track a few times.



Look at these stunning tricks *and* visuals! Lace up those boots, people

The controls can be a bit awkward, but they make sense once you get used to them. Just check the README file for an explanation.

EARTHLINK

- **INSTALL** \ELINK\SETUP.EXE
- **TECH SUPPORT** (800) 395 8410
- **CATEGORY** Online service
- **COMPANY** EarthLink
- **REQUIRED** 486, 8MB RAM, 15MB hard-drive space, SVGA, Windows 3.1 or higher, 9600bps modem

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- **INSTALL** \MSPRING\SETUP.EXE
- **TECH SUPPORT** (800) 719 4660
- **CATEGORY** Online service
- **COMPANY** MindSpring
- **REQUIRED** 486, 8MB RAM, 25MB hard drive space, SVGA, Windows 3.1+, 14.4Kbps or faster modem

MindSpring will launch you onto the Internet with all sorts of goodies at your disposal — use E-mail and the World Wide Web, read Usenet newsgroups, and even gain access to free news, stock information, and web support.

Tha pricing is competitive, too: The Light service gives you five hours of service a month for $6.95 end additional hours for $2 each, along with 5MB of web space for your own web page. The Standerd plan is $14.95 a month for 20 hours, with each additional hour costing $1. You also get 5MB of web space with this one. The Unlimited service gives you unlimited hours for $19.95 a month along with web space, and The Works sarvice givas you unlimited hours, along with two extra E-mail boxes and 10MB of wab space, for $26.95 a month!

MindSpring uses its Pipeline+ software to give Windows 95 users a direct TCP/IP connection to the Internet, using the Microsoft Dial-Up Adapter. That means any of those online games that require a TCP/IP connection will work beautifully with MindSpring. If you use Windows 3.1, MindSpring uses Connect rather than the Dial-Up Adaptar, which gives you a 16-bit TCP/IP connection, so you can still play those online games (as long as they don't raquire a 32-bit connection). For the online gamer, MindSpring offers all you need to start fragging your friends!

With its affordable pricing and a whole slew of services available, MindSpring is a good starting point for getting onto the Internet. Best of all, if you install the software from *The PC Gamer CD*, the $25 launching fee will be waived. Talk about service!

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Alone in the Dark 4

An injection of new blood for an old franchise

Sure, you've all heard of *Resident Evil*, *Silent Hill*, and even *Nocturne*, but how many of you remember the game that started it all? Infogrames' 1993 blockbuster, *Alone in the Dark*, single-handedly started the entire horror survival genre.

The original game had you playing as detective Edward Carnby (or his niece, Emily Hartwood), venturing into Derceto, a deserted mansion that reeked of evil. It was revolutionary for its time, delivering the kinds of emotions that were heretofore only associated with good horror films or novels. There was a palpable feeling of dread as you made your way from room to room, solving puzzles and encountering otherworldly creatures.

Guillaume Goraud, co-founder of developer Darkworks, understands what it was that gave the original game its creepiness. "A lot of times, fear comes from what you can't see," he says. "You can hear it, you see its traces or presence, it's hidden somewhere near you... it's frightening!"

The Alone in the Dark franchise went on to spawn two sequels. The first was a trek through territory occupied by ghostly pirates; the second, a romp through an old western ghost town. While both were entertaining, neither captured the true sense of trepidation and terror that was delivered so beautifully in the first game.



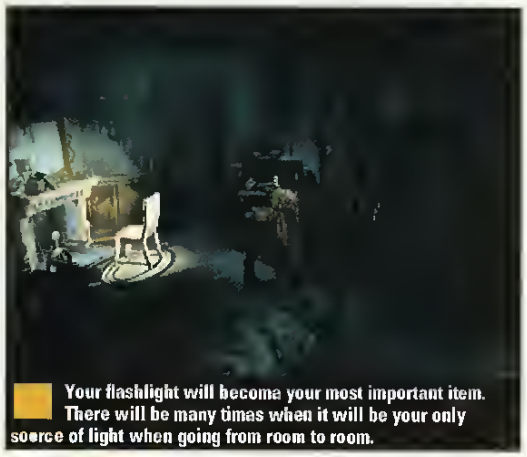
Those crazy camera angles from the previous Alone in the Dark games are back. Expect to see backgrounds more detailed than ever before, like the one seen in this concept sketch.

Well, all that's about to change if developer Darkworks has anything to say about it; *Alone in the Dark 4* is on the way, and the designers' goal is not just to make a fun game — they're going to try their hardest to scare you to death with it.

Edward Carnby is back, but not as we knew him from before. It turns out that the moniker is recycled from time to time, and given to those who meet the special requirements and are deemed worthy of bearing that title. This time around, our supernatural detective is a younger man with a bit more flash and style than the Edward Carnby of yesteryear. He sports a trench coat and a pair of blue jeans, and has moves straight out of a Wachowski Brothers' movie.

> **"A lot of times, fear comes from what you can't see. You can hear it, you see its traces or presence, it's hidden somewhere near you..."**
>
> —GUILLAUME GORAUD, CO-FOUNDER

For this fourth incarnation of the series, our hero is on his way to Shadow Island to search for the killer of his best friend, Charles Fisk. Of course, nothing is as it seems, and Carnby soon finds himself caught up in something bigger than he could have ever conceived. Most of the game will take place in a sprawling mansion, replete with hidden rooms, trap doors, and secrets galore. Of course, the place will be filled with the prerequisite monsters, crea-



Your flashlight will become your most important item. There will be many times when it will be your only source of light when going from room to room.

FYI

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure

DEVELOPER: Darkworks

PUBLISHER: Infogrames, (408) 985-1700, *www.infogrames.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 30%

RELEASE DATE: Fall 2000

IN A NUTSHELL: You are Edward Carnby, a detective of the supernatural, who must travel to a mansion on Shadow Island to find his best friend's killer and avenge his death. Played via a third-person perspective, you explore the deepest, darkest parts of a haunted mansion, interact with many non-player characters, and battle a legion of evil creatures.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL? Come on...this is the return of the Alone in the Dark series! It will take advantage of all the advances that have been made in gaming since the last title, *Alone in the Dark 3*, and the production values are through the roof. Infogrames is putting all it has into this title to make it stand out in a crowd of *Resident Evil* wannabes.

www.DailyRadar.com



Edward Carnby is back (sort of), new and improved for the 21st century.

tures, and baddies, all intent on ending your explorations. Like its predecessors, the game is played from a third-person perspective, featuring polygonal objects on top of pre-rendered backgrounds.

One of the coolest gameplay twists in *Alone 4* is that the entire game deals with the theme of light versus dark; the good guys like the light, but the creatures you encounter in the game would rather wear shades. Each monster will react differently to it. Some of the smaller creatures will scurry away from the beam of your flashlight, while others may charge you in a mad rush of fury if you even so much as light a match around them. Even your ammo is going to cause you to think carefully about how you use it; your pistol fires phosphorus bullets, which both illuminate and perforate your target at the same time. You'll also have a laser that you can bounce off mirrors to hit monsters lurking around the corners of hallways.

You probably won't want to go anywhere in the mansion without your flashlight, either. The designers have purposely made the difficulty of the game increase depending upon how dark the area is. For example, if you walk into a room that's pitch black, you'll have to deal with more monsters than if you walked into the same room and turned on the lights. Unfortunately, illumination is a rare commodity — the mansion is old, and it still runs on gaslights. This means that you'll have to get your hands on some matches and light up every lamp yourself. But that's not all; the supply of gas to the mansion is limited, so it can, and will, cut out from time to time (and probably at the worst possible moments), leaving you in complete darkness. And if that wasn't enough, your flashlight's batteries don't last forever, either. As fate would have it, though, you can find extra batteries scattered throughout the house (isn't that convenient?).

Oddly, despite the word "alone" being featured prominently in the title, the plan is for Carnby to encounter non-player characters throughout his journey. The trick is that you won't be sure if any of the 12 people you'll run into is out to help or hinder your progress. They should, however, help to drive the story along.

When discussing what direction the new game will take, Goraud says, "*Alone in the Dark* was the first real survival horror game and was the inspiration for other more recent survival horror games. With that in mind, we plan on keeping several of the elements that made the original *Alone in the Dark* a hit in 1993, while adding new elements in terms of its graphics, sound, and storyline."

We hope that Darkworks will be able to create something fresh and new while sticking to the eerie suspense of the original *Alone in the Dark* and also avoid becoming, ironically, just another *Resident Evil* clone. If it sticks to the game plan, we may just be looking at the triumphant revival of one of the PC's great series.

—Li Kuo

Unparalleled Production Values

We keep hearing that some day, the production quality of videogames will match those of movies. It looks like that day is drawing ever closer. Infogrames is paying top dollar to create a game experience like no other. A professional sculptor was brought in to make scale models of every character and creature in the game. These models were then scanned into a computer to be used in the game. A painter was also brought in to create full-sized versions of the paintings that will then be scaled down and virtually hung on the walls of the mansion.

The French juggernaut isn't stopping there, though; it's currently talking to a big-name rock band about performing the game's theme song, and a celebrity to perform the voice of Edward Carnby. To top it all off, *Alone in the Dark 4* will have 1,300 pre-rendered backgrounds, 300 animations for *each* character, and 100 different death animations just for Carnby.

This is going to be Infogrames' flagship title for 2000, and the company is not pulling any punches. Guillaume Goraud says, "Once the decision was made to make this latest version, the company decided to be committed and to spend whatever necessary to make sure it was a huge success." We hope that every penny spent will be visible on the screen when the game comes out later this year.



Every creature in *Alone in the Dark 4* was made into a scale model by a professional sculptor and then scanned into a computer in order to be put into the game.



The mansion on Shadow Island will have its share of hidden rooms.

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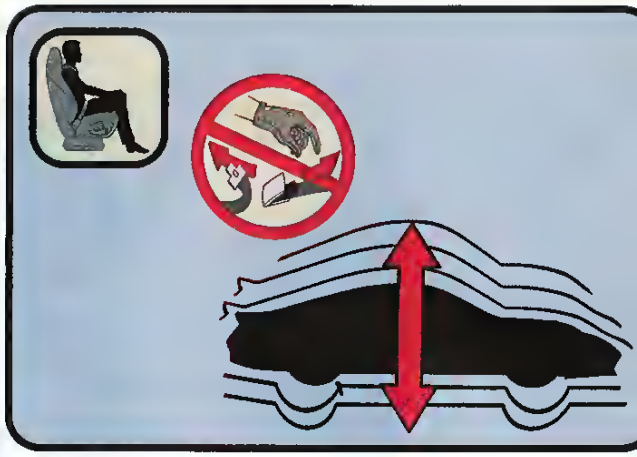
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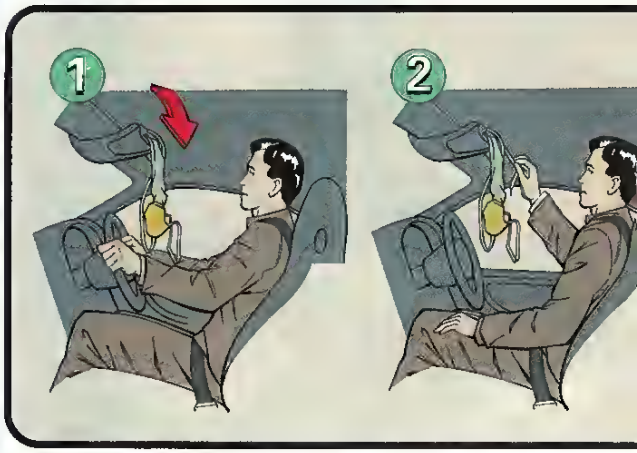
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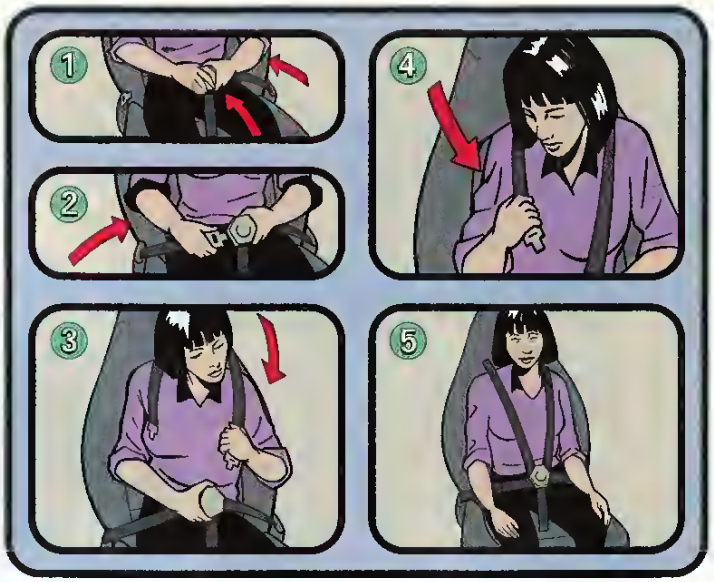
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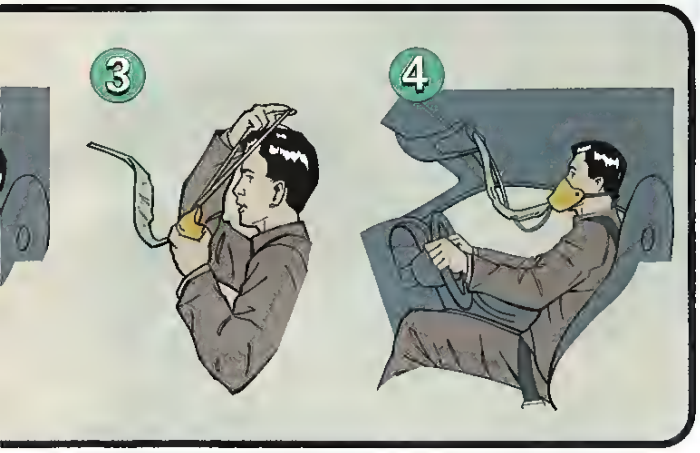
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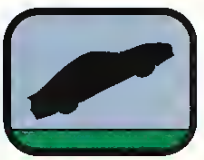




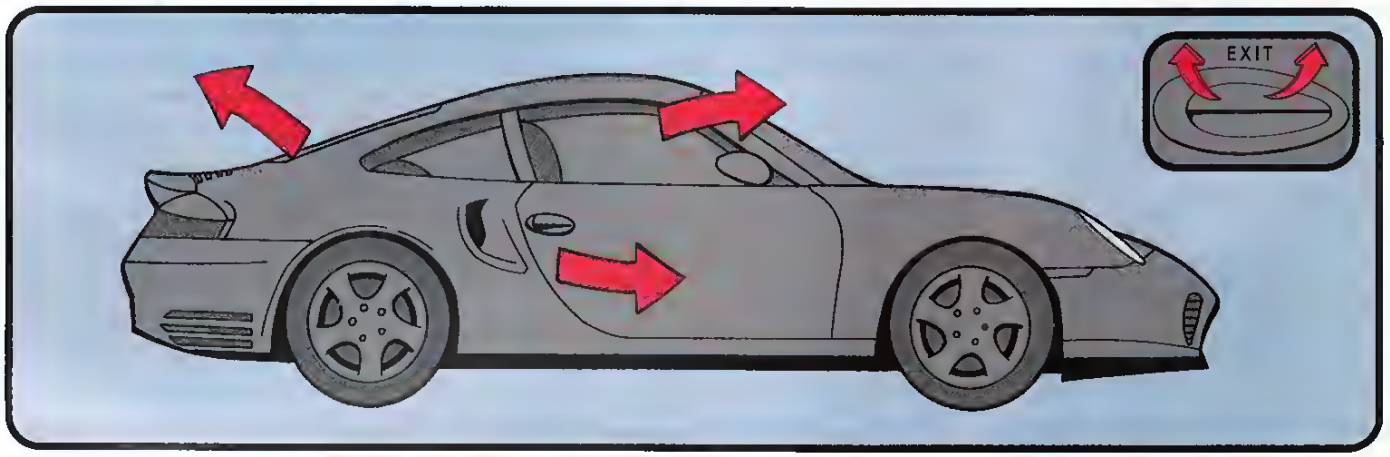












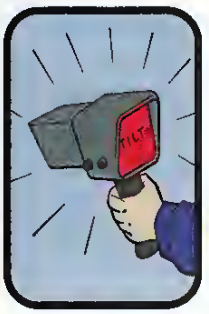




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Rune

Bludgeon, chop, pillage, and plunder with some help from the *Unreal* engine

When you think about it, it's a little surprising that there haven't been more Viking games. C'mon, let's face it, Vikings are basically the perfect material for a computer game — sailing nonchalantly to foreign shores to whoop ass, burn, plunder, and generally get it done, this culture presents the idea fodder for a PC gaming hero.

Human Head Studios, a member of Gathering of Developers, seems to agree and is planning to unleash the Nordic bully in us all this summer. In *Rune*, you'll get to step into the boots of Ragnar, a young Viking who's trying to follow in the bootsteps of his bad-ass dad. That means descending into the catacombs of a hostile subterranean realm to lay waste to endless hordes of beasties. (Of course, I'd always argue that if I'm sent on a journey to prove my manhood and the very first encounter finds me chopping a dozen evil creatures to bits, then dammit, I already proved my manhood and the quest is over right there. But hey, when your name's Ragnar, who ya gonna complain to?)

Rune uses a heavily modified version of the *Unreal* engine, and features many of the graphical perks that come with the technology. But it also moves in different visual directions. Some of the engine modifications allow for the importing of SoftImage skeletal art into the character models, ensuring much better animation from the characters. Shadow projection will allow shadows to climb spookily up walls, and transparency effects will be applied to individual body parts.



It's a good thing Ragnar's got a mammoth, oversized hammer, because against foes like this one, he'll need the biggest weapons he can possibly find.



The subterranean underworld holds a lot of nasty surprises for a Viking.

"Ragnar can interact with lots of things, and use them," says Rhinehart. "He can chop off an enemy's arm and then beat them to death with it. That trick also works in multiplayer mode. We expect it to become a big goal of deathmatching...trying to chop off your buddy's arm and club him with it." That won't be the only improvised weapon available, either. Torches, castaway bones, rocks, and other such dungeon detritus can become lethal weapons in the angry hand of a Viking.

While the focus is definitely going to be on mass melee combat, Human Head Studios is also hoping to keep *Rune* interesting for fans of fantasy storytelling. Thus the developers included plot elements such as the Dark Vikings, a mysterious race of rebellious brethren, a confrontation with whom forms the basis of Ragnar's quest. The setting of the adventure will also shift from the underworld to mountain reaches to the forests of the realm's dwarven tribes. But while the scenery may shift and the plot may twist, you can bet good money that no matter where he goes, Ragnar's principal interest will be severing heads in the most efficient manner possible.

So start sharpening your oversized axe for the summer's carnage. *Rune* looks like good fun for any aficionado of the chop.

—Daniel Morris

> **"You can chop off an enemy's arm and then beat them to death with it. That trick also works in multiplayer mode. We expect it to become a big goal of deathmatching... trying to chop off your buddy's arm and club him with it."**
>
> —CHRIS RHINEHART, PROGRAMMER

FYI:

CATEGORY: Action

DEVELOPER: Human Head Studios

PUBLISHER: GOD.
(877) GOD-GAME, *www.rune.com*

PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 70%

RELEASE DATE: Summer 2000

www.DailyRadar.com



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Earth 2150

Topware looks to take the RTS genre to new levels...literally

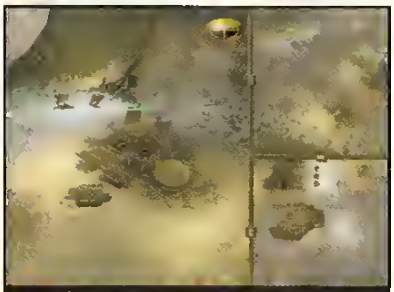
When I was told I was going to be previewing *Earth 2150*, I almost started to weep. It's not that I'm not a fan of the genre, but this was my very first assignment for *PC Gamer*...my first chance to show my fellow gamers my talent (or lack thereof), and I get stuck with an RTS reeking of the musty old formula — take three races of balanced units on a destroyed planet, mix well, and, *voila!* — instant (and most likely bland) RTS game. My eyes rolled, as yours are most likely doing now.

Well, eyes front and center, mister! We've got something quite interesting brewing here.

Okay, so the set-up's not exactly new: 150 years hence, Earth's orbit is decaying, bringing it dangerously close to the Sun, and it's up to the Lunar Corporation, the Eurasian Dynasty, or the United Civilized States (the three *sides*, not races, that you can choose to play) to use what resources are left to create an evacuation fleet. Starting from your Home Base, you'll be assigned the missions (30 for each side) you'll need to undertake in order to achieve the ultimate goal — getting the hell off a soon-to-be-broiled planet!

The interface is extremely well done, with up to three camera views available at one time. You may work within each view — fighting, building, and giving orders — while also switching to whichever "hot spot" you need to on the main view. It's nothing revolutionary, but it gets the job done with a minimum of fuss.

As time passes, day turns into night, weather changes, and all four seasons cycle. You're also moving closer to the Sun, meaning the earth is constantly changing, as is the terrain. Your Home Base, which started out safely tucked away, may now be on a collision course with molten lava, or flooded with water.



Once you get used to handling the three camera views, you'll love the control you have over the battlefield.



Lights on buildings and vehicles can be set to "On," "Off," or "Auto." Turning off all the lights at night makes you very hard to find and comes in handy when trying to surprise your enemies.

Earth 2150 sports one of the finest 3D engines I've ever seen in a game of this type. Steven Peterson, the associate producer, was extremely enthusiastic about the engine: "The functionality of the 3D engine is not all fluff; it's not just for show. The 3D terrain adds to the strategy of the game. It's the only 3D engine to support actual terrain deformation."

> **"The functionality of the 3D engine is not all fluff; it's not just for show. The 3D terrain adds to the strategy of the game."**
>
> —Steven Peterson, associate producer

The engine also allows for subterranean play. When below the surface, you'll have a second map that is an underground version of the terrain above. New levels of strategy come into play here, as there may be impassable areas you cannot tunnel through. Of course, if you find the correct path, you'll be able to pop up right in enemy territory — the ultimate in surprise attacks. Warfare is also possible underground.

Whether burrowing underground or taking in the 3D vistas on the planet's surface, the visuals are quite stunning; a 3D accelerator is required and the engine will support resolutions from 640x480x16-bit color up to 1280x1024 x32-bit. The real-time lighting, though beautifully done, isn't just eye candy. For instance, you may choose to have your buildings and units sit with their lights off, waiting in the dark for the enemy to appear. As soon as they approach, it's lights on and good-bye bad guys.

What's so impressive about *Earth 2150* is that the impeccable attention to detail that is being put into the game is not limited to just making things pretty; it's all about making the gameplay better, and it all has a purpose. Take weather conditions; they'll affect unit movement and ammo trajectory. If the winds are too high, you can forget about getting that helicopter or transport in for a landing.

Research and creation of your units is essential, and you can save units you have created to disk. When you play a new game and have the required technology, that unit will become available. Skirmish and Multiplayer modes are also included, as is one of the most impressive mission editors I've ever had the pleasure of using. There are many more features within this game, but as Peterson puts it, "The beginner and expert can play this game at their own playing level." And I'm betting that all will enjoy it.

—Rich LaPorte

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: Real-Time Strategy

DEVELOPER: TopWare Interactive

PUBLISHER: Red Orb Entertainment (415-895-2000), *www.redorb.com*

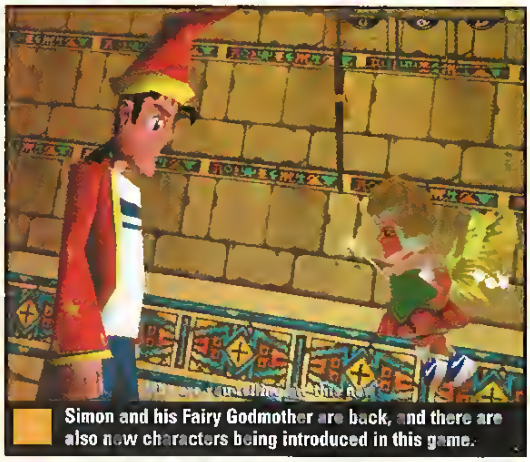
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 85%

RELEASE DATE: April

Simon the Sorcerer 3D

The original youthful British wizard returns!

It wasn't that long ago that adventure fans met a plucky 12-year-old English boy who was suddenly called upon to learn the ways of magic and proudly wear a red robe emblazoned with moons and stars. I bet you think I'm talking about that Johnny-come-lately Harry Potter, aren't you? I'm not. I'm referring to none other than Simon the Sorcerer, the star of a couple of beloved graphic adventure games in the early nineties. He's back, and like so many of his adventuring brethren, he returns not in familiar 2D, but in full 3D, joining the likes of Indiana Jones and the Prince of Persia (and hopefully faring better than both). *Simon the Sorcerer 3D* from Headfirst Games is coming soon, and it promises to take itself much less seriously than the other guys do.

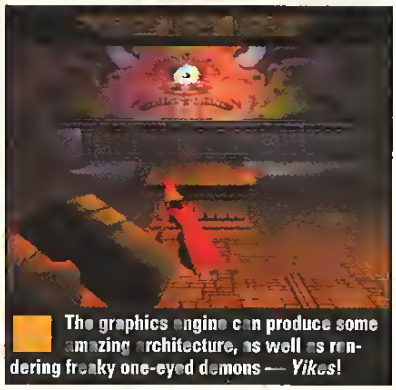


Simon and his Fairy Godmother are back, and there are also new characters being introduced in this game.

In this new incarnation, Simon must once again face the evil Sorcerer Sordid, who has returned from the grave and is hatching yet another nefarious scheme. Simon must challenge Sordid for control of the Nexus of the Universe, a giant computer that happens to run the galaxy. During the course of his adventure, Simon will have to navigate an Aztec temple, a swamp, a dwarf mine, a huge city, a magical forest, and, of course, the evil Sordid's lair itself.

> **"A feature of the first two games were the bizarre, but logical, puzzles, and this is certainly something we've carried on in *Simon 3D*."**
>
> —Mike Woodruffe, director

Gameplay will unfold using an intentionally cartoonish and colorful 3D engine, which should be perfect in keeping with the humor that the series is known for. The proprietary NetImmerse 3D engine has been used to render 80 original characters, several environments, and to give Simon a purportedly limitless range of expressions. Expect to see old friends like the buffoonish Calypso, the manic-depressive Swampy, and of course, Simon's Fairy Godmother, along with typically tongue-in-cheek new characters like Melissa Leg (a female-warrior type — think Xena in yellow pigtails), and a couple of guys who shoot gnomes for sport (meaning they use gnomes as ammunition). Multiple endings and hidden characters should enhance replay value.



The graphics engine can produce some amazing architecture, as well as rendering freaky one-eyed demons — *Yikes!*

Despite the somewhat trendy move to 3D, Simon fans should feel right at home almost immediately, according to Headfirst's Managing Director Mike Woodruffe. "A feature of the first two games were the bizarre, but logical, puzzles — and this is certainly something we've carried on in *Simon 3D*," he says. "Within half an hour of starting the game, you'll have a gnome smeared in butter in your inventory."

After playing an incomplete version of the game, it's obvious that Headfirst took the higher road here by using the 3D engine to create puzzles while avoiding the combat-intensive crutch all the other 3D adventures are relying on. Adventure fans will probably agree that this is a very good idea.

Given the amazing popularity of that other kid sorcerer with the magic cloak, it seems that Headfirst's timing couldn't be better. "Harry Potter has been the topic of quite a lot of conversation in our office — the general opinion being *we did it first!*" says Woodruffe ruefully. But he quickly explained that they do not disparage J.K. Rowling's literary achievements at all. In fact, as Woodruffe pointed out at the conclusion of our conversation, "If the right person is reading this article, we'd love to do a Harry Potter game." It seems to us that this idea would be a natural.

—Andrew S. Bub

F.Y.I.

CATEGORY: 3D Adventure

DEVELOPER: Headfirst Games

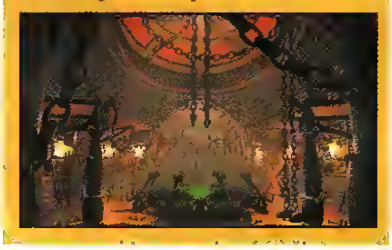
PUBLISHER: Southpeak Interactive
(919) 677-4499, *www.southpeak.com*

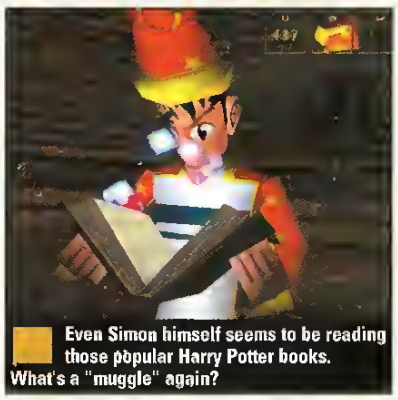
PERCENTAGE COMPLETE: 60%

RELEASE DATE: April

2D Simon

Simon the Sorcerer first appeared in 1993, followed by a sequel in 1995. Both games were modest successes financially, but are fondly remembered by those who played them. The proposed third edition to the series was halted in mid-development, according to Headfirst, due to lack of interest on the part of distributors (in other words, a lack of interest in 2D graphical adventure titles in the wake of *Tomb Raider*). The team remained loyal, and the concept was finally sold as a 3D game last year.





Even Simon himself seems to be reading those popular Harry Potter books. What's a "muggle" again?

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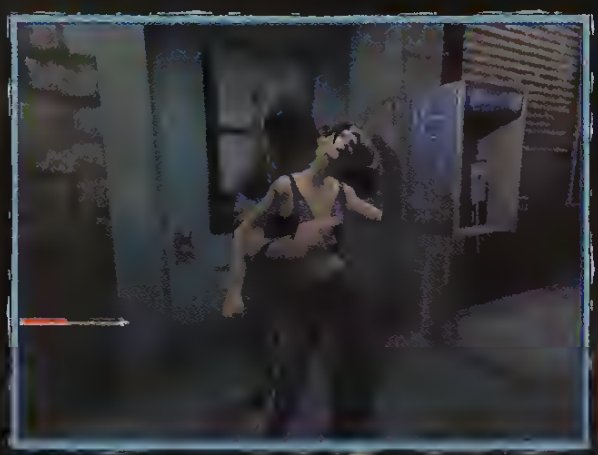
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Necromancer

Long hours of study in donk mousoleo hove made his skin pole ond corpselike, his figure, skeletal. Most people shun him far his peculior looks ond ways, but none doubt the power of the Necromoncer, for it is the stuff of nightmores.

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Sierra Speaks Out

Sierra gives its side of the story regarding its latest reorganization

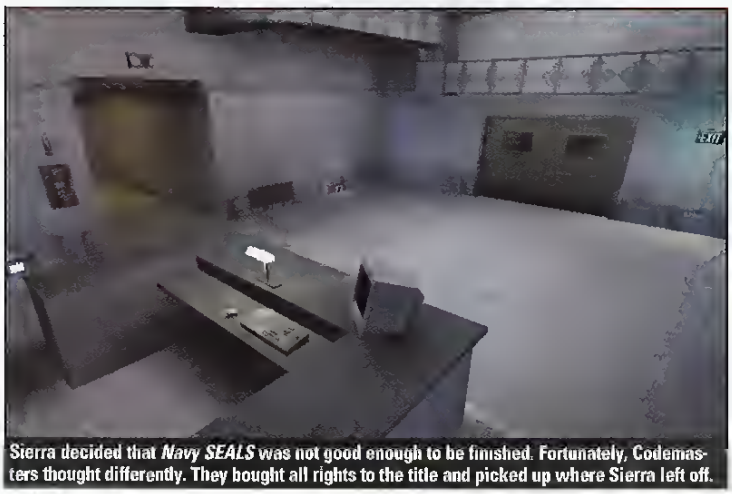
In the December 1999 issue of *PC Gamer*, we ran a news story titled "The Sierra Shuffle," detailing the most recent reorganization at Sierra. As a result of this restructuring, some highly anticipated titles were cancelled (such as *Babylon 5* and *Desert Fighters*) and more than 100 people lost their jobs. After reading our story, Sierra requested that it have the chance to further explain the changes that have been taking place in the company and give its side of the story — and we were happy to oblige. We recently spoke with Sierra's president, Dave Grenewatzki, and asked him to respond to the points we raised in the original news piece, as well as fill us in on where Sierra is headed for the future. Here's what he had to say:

Were the 105 people who lost their jobs at Sierra compensated? Did Sierra aid them in finding new jobs?

Sierra was generous in offering compensation to those employees who lost their jobs. In addition to that compensation, Sierra offered outplacement services to assist these employees in finding new jobs.

Why were these people let go so soon after many had already been relocated to Bellevue, WA?

The product decisions were made at the point in which it was clear that there was not a chance to build an economically viable product. It was a combination of out-of-control development costs, extremely slow development, and the appropriateness of the products in development to a changing marketplace. The decision was implemented as soon as it became clear that the products were on the wrong side of so many key criteria.



Sierra decided that *Navy SEALS* was not good enough to be finished. Fortunately, Codemasters thought differently. They bought all rights to the title and picked up where Sierra left off.

Why was the decision made to cancel so many titles?

All titles in development went through extensive study on metrics of design, market conditions and development budgets. The products that didn't make the cut were cancelled. Many of these products had been through this process earlier in their development process and had already been given a "second chance" — the final review indicated the need to end them.



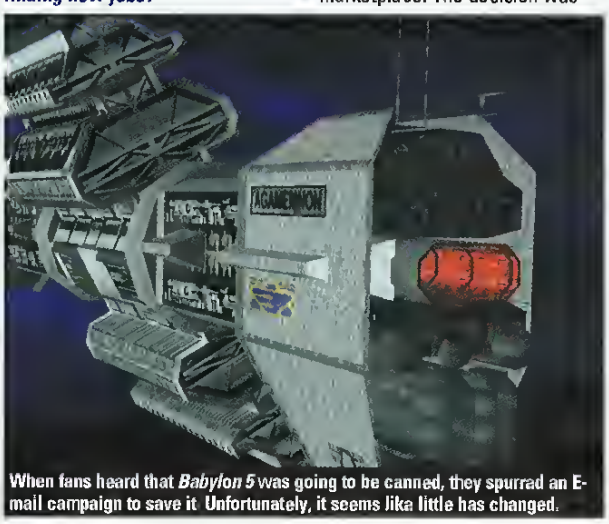
Dave Grenewetzki, the President of Sierra, speaks out.

How will all the changes brought about by the restructuring improve Sierra?

Sierra has complete focus, organization, and experienced development teams who are not only gamers themselves, but are committed to the development of the highest quality entertainment titles. Our recent changes enable all of us to focus on what our customers have always wanted — great games.

What do you expect we'll see from Sierra in the future? Will there be any more restructuring?

Sierra has created a fun environment that encourages creativity and fun. Our management team is stronger than it's ever been and our business is growing. Our current lineup for the year 2000 and beyond looks very strong. There are no other plans for restructuring, but we continue to monitor the business environment, the marketplace, and the products we have in development and we will do what is necessary to keep Sierra at the leading edge of the gaming business.



When fans heard that *Babylon 5* was going to be canned, they spurred an E-mail campaign to save it. Unfortunately, it seems like little has changed.

www.DailyRadar.com

Age of Empires II Contest Winners

Join us in congratulating the winners of our *Age of Empires II* contest. The Grand Prize winners will receive a Microsoft Intellimouse Explorer, a Microsoft Natural Keyboard Pro, a copy of *Age of Empires II*, an *Age of Empires II* poster autographed by Bruce Shelley, and an *Age II* t-shirt. The First Prize winners will each get a copy of the game, the t-shirt, and the autographed poster. The Second Prize winners will each get a copy of the game. You could be our next winner, so make sure you enter our monthly contests.

Grand Prize Winners:
Steve Kosoris, Madeline Vincent, Todd Henke

First Prize Winners:
Mark Rutledge, Matthew Byington

Second Prize Winners:
Scott Dinsmore, Jim York, Brian Bottorff, Jason Long, Jerry Gelder, Victor Lin, Russ Williams, Jon Hartman, Freddy Rosario, Omar Siddique



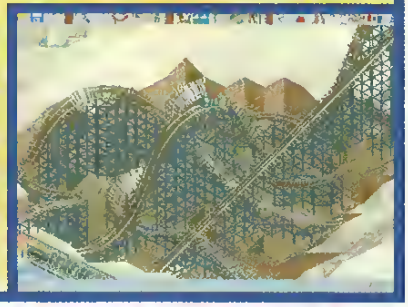
A PC GAMER CONTEST

RollerCoaster Tycoon Giveaway!

The competition for the title of real-time strategy game of the year was tight — perhaps tighter than it's ever been. And while it took a great deal of yelling and bickering to finally settle on our winner, we all agreed that *RollerCoaster Tycoon* from MicroProse was a strong contender. Its unbelievably addictive gameplay was a refreshing change from the daily routine of tank rushes and base-building.

It was so much fun, in fact, that we just had to make sure that our readers got in on the good times. So we called up MicroProse and begged for a few copies to give away. Much to our delight (and eventually, to some of you lucky enough to win), we scored 10 copies of this great game. But we're not your average computer games magazine; we go the extra mile to put a smile on our readers' faces — we also have 10 copies of *Corkscrew Follies*, the sensational add-on pack, to give away too!

Sound good? You bet it does, and 10 of you are going to reap the benefits by receiving a copy of both *RollerCoaster Tycoon* and the expansion pack. All you need to do is send an e-mail to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with "RCT Giveaway" in the subject heading. Be sure to include your address so we know where to send your prize if you win. The deadline for this contest is March 15, 2000, and we'll select our winners on or about that date. So don't procrastinate — get those entries in! See additional contest rules on page 39.



>>THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>>>>

>> Tim Schafer, the game god behind such designs as *Grim Fandango* and *Full Throttle*, has left LucasArts Entertainment. So far there has been no word on what his next move will be, but the split was amicable according to LucasArts, and the two parties are expected to continue a relationship.

>> Id Software's *Quake III Arena* is selling just fine, thank you; 50,000 units flew off the shelves in its first three days in stores. It looks like there's a good chance that *Quake III* will continue the trend of being one of the most successful game franchises ever, despite the fierce competition from GT Interactive's (now Infogrames') *Unreal Tournament*.



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Brazil Bans Sales of *Duke Nukem 3D*

Six PC games have been banned by Brazil's Justice Ministry

A ministry representative in Brazil announced that police were ordered to withdraw all copies of *Doom*, *Mortal Kombat*, *Requiem*, *Blood*, *Postal*, and *Duke Nukem 3D* from store shelves. These six games were all deemed to be too violent by the Brazilian Justice Ministry. Vendors who fail to comply with the order will be fined $11,000 for each day that the game(s) remain on their shelves.

This Gestapo-like asseult on the gaming industry came about as a result of e November shooting at a posh shopping mall in San Peulo, in which Mateus de Costa Meira, a 24-year-old computer devotee, killed three people and wounded eight others. Police say that Meira may heve tried to recreate a scene from *Duke Nukem 3D*. We're betting that Meira's actions are attributed more to the cocaine found in his blood and his previous stress-related problems than to the psychosis-inducing power found in any video game, however.

PC GAMER *RECOMMENDS*

Recently released games that you shouldn't live without

UNREAL TOURNAMENT



Take our word for it — *Unreal Tournament* has got it all. With its good looks, great bots, killer levels, awesome gameplay modes, and cool weapons, you'll heve a most excellant gameplay axperianca. Whatevar you do, don't miss playing assault on the Dverlord map.

SWAT 3



Sierra is giving *Rogue Spear* a run for its money with its letest incarnation of the SWAT series. Boasting detailed graphics, frighteningly intelligent AI, and impressively realistic physics, *SWAT 3* is easily one of the best squad-basad tactical sims out thara and a must-buy for fans of action gamas that requira more than just fast reflaxes.

AGE OF WONDERS



Epic MegaGames has gone and made a strategy gama that is sure to satisfy the hardest of hardcore turn-based strategy junkies. *Age of Wonders* is an incredibly deep and rich game with *e* great story and terrific atmosphera. Don't count turn-basad strategy out just yet — games like this prove thara's plenty of life left in the old girl.

NBA LIVE 2000



We're not sure how much longer EA Sports can keep topping itself, but wa sure are glad it keeps trying. *NBA Live 2000* is a prime examplo of how the evolution of a sports series should procead. This year's version offers smartar play, more realistic AI, and better graphics than ever. Sports gamers woufd have to ba insane to miss this title.

>>THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>>>>

>> Deathmatch maps based on Neil Manke's latest masterpiece, *They Hunger*, are now available for your downloading pleasure, and can be found at *www.dailyradar.com*. The full version of *They Hunger* was available on *The CD* included with the February issue of *PC Gamer*. It's also on this month's CD!

>> *Third World*, a squad-based roleplaying title from Redlin. Games, has be.n cancelled ..again. The first cancellation came at the hands of then-publisher Activision. This time around it looks like it's for good — Reilline Games attributed the cancellation to financial problems — unless a new influx of cash can be found.



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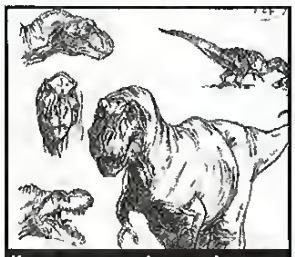
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Jurassic Sid

The next (very) big thing from Sid Meier? Dinosaurs!

Ask any veteran gamer to name the first game designer that pops into their head, and chances are pretty good that Sid Meier will be that name. He is undoubtedly among the most prolific and respected men in the games business, so when Meier speaks up about the next game he's working on, you better believe there's a horde of people with a hand cupped near their ear, making sure they don't miss a word.



If anyone can make a cool game about dinosaurs, it's Sid Meier.

So, after traveling into the future with *Alpha Centauri*, Meier and his matas at Firaxis are set to complete what they're calling the Sweep of Time Trilogy with the tentatively titled *Sid Meier's Dinosaurs!* (*Civilization* is the other game that makes up the triumvirate). So far, very little is known about the game, other than the fact that it is being done by Meier himself (some games that baar Meier's moniker are actually done without his direct involvement, although as director of creative development at Firaxis, he is ultimately responsible for everything that goes out the door), and that it will involve strategic gameplay. It will reportedly be a real-time game. There's some interesting material to be found on the subject at the game's official website, *www.firaxis.com/dinosaurs*.

Of course, considering Meier's track record, we're mora than willing to bet that this game will turn more than a few heads when Firaxis decides it's ready for public consumption sometime later this year.

Cavedog Cancels *Amen*

Set to focus on evergreen Total Annihilation *brand*

Cavedog Entertainment has decided to refocus its internal product development. What does this mean? Well, for one, it means the end of the first-person shooter, *Amen*, a highly anticipated title that showed great promise at last year's E3 show. The game had been in development for more than two years, but was still a long way from completion.



Amen looked great, but that didn't stop Cavedog from canning it to refocus on its gravy train franchise, *Total Annihilation*.

Cavedog decided to cut its losses and instead concentrate its efforts on the *Total Annihilation* brand, which is its claim to fame.

Next up for Cavedog will be *The Iron Plague*, an add-on pack for *Total Annihilation: Kingdoms*. The company will also try to get mora recognition for Boneyards, its online gaming site. Of course, the big future project is *Total Annihilation 2*, but little is known about the direction this game is taking, other than that it's in the works.

While the *Total Annihilation* franchise is great in its own right, we were looking forward to seeing what Cavedog was capable of doing outside of the real-time strategy genre. *Good and Evil*, the ambitious real-time roleplaying/strategy game from Ron Gilbert, is still on the agenda, but Cavadog won't even speculate about a release date. So, it may be some time bafore we sea anything from Cavedog that's unrelated to the *Total Annihilation* line of gamas.

>> THE PCG NEWS TICKER >>>>

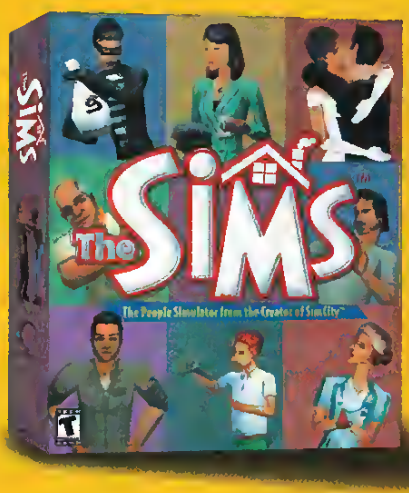
Wannabe stockbrokers will finally get the chance to test out their skills when *Wall Street Trader 2000* hits our shores. This business simulator was first published in France, where it was very successful (Yeah, but they like Jerry Lewis, so you can't go by that — Ed.). Players will be able to immerse themselves in the dark underside of the business world by early 2000.

Bad news for games in the United Kingdom. The House of Commons is proposing a 50 pence (that's about 80 cents to you and me) tax on computer games. The plan is to use this additional tax money for educational purposes. Hey! — computer games are educational! What's wrong with you people?



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THE TOP-SELLING GAMES: NOW AND THEN

THE TOP SELLERS TODAY...

NO.	GAME	PUBLISHER	PCG RATING
1.	*Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*	Disney	78%
2.	*RollerCoaster Tycoon*	Hasbro Interactive	89%
3.	*Age of Empires II: Age Of Kings*	Microsoft	94%
4.	*Frogger*	Hasbro Interactive	32%
5.	*Deer Hunter III*	GT Interactive	N/A
6.	*Quake III Arena*	Activision	80%
7.	*Barbie Generation: Girl Gotta Groove*	Mattel Interactive	N/A
8.	*Microsoft Flight Simulator 2000*	Microsoft	85%
9.	*Toy Story 2 Action Game*	Disney	N/A
10.	*SimCity 3000*	Electronic Arts	89%

...AND THIS TIME FIVE YEARS AGO

NO.	GAME	PUBLISHER	PCG RATING
1.	*Myst*	Mattel Interactive	95%
2.	*Doom II*	GT Interactive	90%
3.	*Wing Commander III*	Electronic Arts	96%
4.	*SimCity 2000*	Electronic Arts	95%
5.	*King's Quest VII*	Havas Interactive	84%
6.	*Doom Shareware*	id Software	N/A
7.	*7th Guest*	Interplay	N/A
8.	*Star Trek TNG Tech Manual*	Simon & Schuster	N/A
9.	*NASCAR Racing*	Havas Interactive	94%
10.	*X-Wing Collector's CD*	LucasArts	N/A

THE PCG RELEASE METER

Taking care of all your release date needs

The near future is looking mighty bright for PC gamers. Just take a glance at the list, and you'll find a great many games that promise hours upon hours of joyous entertainment. Look... there's *The Sims*!...and not too far from that is *Thief II: The Metal Age*...and then there's *Soldier of Fortune*...it all looks so very good! As you know, though, the only sure things in life are death and taxes, so take these dates with the requisite grain of salt. This list is as accurate as possible, but there are no guarantees. To find out when your favorite game actually hits the store shelves, we recommend you point your web browser to *www.gonegold.com*, the best site on the 'net for new releases. Please send news of release dates to *laporte@gonegold.com*.









TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE	PROGNOSIS
Wings of Destiny	Psygnosis	02/02/00	Will be landing
Formula One '99	Psygnosis	02/02/00	Set to go
Metal Fatigue	Psygnosis	02/04/00	Exhausted, but finished
Kiss Psycho Circus	G.O.D.	02/04/00	Later
The Sims	Maxis	02/04/00	Virtually here
Blaze and Blade	South Peak	02/08/00	You bet
Brunswick Pro Pool 3D 2	Head Games	02/10/00	Bank on it
Risk II	Hasbro	02/16/00	Agreed
Nox	Westwood	02/16/00	Firming up
Messiah	Interplay	02/17/00	Amen
Tiger Woods 2000	EA Sports	02/17/00	Four!
Daikatana	Eidos	02/18/00	Keeps going...and going...
Rent a Hero	South Peak	02/22/00	Sure thing
Superbike 2000	EA	02/22/00	Light looks green
Tzar: Burden of the Crown	Talonsoft	02/25/00	Prepare for battle
Codename Eagle	Talonsoft	02/25/00	Sure fire
Jeremy McGrath Supercross 2K	Acclaim	02/28/00	In gear
Le Mans 24 Hour	Infogrames	02/29/00	Checkered flag
IHRA Drag Racing	Bethesda	03/02/00	Green light
Imperium Galactica II	GT Interactive	03/02/00	Blasts off
Test Drive Cycles	Infogrames	03/02/00	Start the bag
Shadow Watch	Red Storm	03/03/00	It's golden









TITLE	PUBLISHER	DATE	PROGNOSIS
Dawn of War	South Peak	03/07/00	Battle begins
Die Hard Trilogy 2	Fox	03/07/00	Hmm...could be
C&C Firestorm	Westwood	03/08/00	So they say
F-18 Super Hornet	Titus	03/14/00	On the ball
Star Trek Armada	Activision	03/14/00	Make it so
Soldier of Fortune	Activision	03/15/00	Zeroed in
Alpha Centauri Planetary Pack	EA	03/15/00	Looks good
Wild Metal Country	Rockstar	03/16/00	Give it two weeks
Ultima Online: Renaissance	Origin	03/16/00	More time
Thief II: The Metal Age	Eidos	03/17/00	Sneaks in
Wall Street Tycoon	UbiSoft	03/18/00	Buy! Sell! Buy!
Business Tycoon	UbiSoft	03/18/00	Agreed
Majesty	Cyberlore	03/21/00	You bet
Need For Speed 5	EA	03/22/00	On time
Nascar 2000	EA	03/22/00	Caution flag
B-17 Flying Fortress	MicroProse	03/23/00	Possible
Tachyon	NovaLogic	03/23/00	Next month
Shogun: Total War	EA	03/24/00	It would be nice, but
Formula One Championship	EA	03/24/00	Yes
Vampire	Activision	03/29/00	Have garlic ready
Dukes of Hazzard	South Peak	03/30/00	April

THE PCG NEWS TICKER

Codemasters, the folks behind *Touring Car Challenge 2* have just penned a deal with Mike Tyson. The England based company will be releasing a boxing game titled *Mike Tyson Boxing* in May. The deal gives Codemasters exclusive rights to the ex-champ's name and likeness.

Woe to those who eagerly anticipate the release of Sierra's *Team Fortress 2*; the spectacular-looking multiplayer game has been delayed once again. This latest setback has the game releasing late this year. Remember, patience is a virtue.

Who wants to be a virtual millionaire? Apparently, a lot of people do. *Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?*, the PC game, has sold more than a million copies in just four weeks. In fact, the game has reportedly been selling out all over North America.

Fans of traditional console-style roleplaying games should be happy to hear that *Lunar: Silver Star Story*, from Working Designs, will soon be released for the PC. Originally a Sega CD game, *Lunar* was later ported to Saturn and Playstation. Expect it to be on the shelves this spring.

www.DailyRadar.com

Next Month

The Ultimate Design Lab!

Our regular *PC Gamer* Design Lab took a break this month, but we'll be more than making up for it next issue with the return of the regular lab and a very special feature. We'll be hooking up with first-person design geniuses like Zoid, Cliff Bleszinski of *Unreal Tournament* fame, and our own *Half-Life* mod god Neil Manke to teach you everything you need to know to create your own *Quake III Arena*, *Unreal Tournament*, and *Half-Life* levels to become a full-fledged Game God. Don't dare miss it!

Your All-Time Top 50!

The results are in! Check out next issue for the *PC Gamer* Readers' 50 Best Games Ever. Yowza!

Reviews

All the latest *Daikatana*, *Battlezone II*, *Pharaoh*, *Odium*, *Tiger Woods 2000*, *Slave Zero*, *Wild Wild West*... and more!

PC Gamer April 2000 will be on sale March 14 at all good outlets. If a retailer tells you they don't stock it, don't believe 'em! They just want to keep it and read it themselves.

WAITING IS THE HARDEST PART

Gimme! Gimme! Gimme!

Once again, the overwhelming response for most anticipated game was for Blizzard's *Diablo II*. It's good to see that there are still games that pique the interest of so many gamers out there, but for cryin' out loud — how many months in a row is this? The masses have spoken, and they want *Diablo II*.

So go ahead, send in another E-mail to *eyewitness@pcgamer.com* with "Waiting is the Hardest Part" as the subject line and tell us that you just can't wait for *Diablo II*. Of course, you're free to put in a vote for any other game that you really want to get your hands on. Regardless, we'll still randomly pick one lucky winner to receive a free game. All entries must be received by the 30th of each month to be eligible for that month's drawing, and the winner will be notified by E-mail with his or her name also printed in the magazine. See additional contest rules below.

Congratulations to this month's winner, Allen Katz. Allen, like last month's winner, can't wait for *Duke Nukem Forever*. Good for you, Allen — fight the power! Stand guard by your mailbox — your prize will be arriving any day now.

1.	*Diablo II*	15%
2.	*Team Fortress 2*	11%
3.	*The Sims*	8%
4.	*Thief II*	6%
5.	*Command & Conquer: Renegade*	5%
6	*WarCraft III*	4%
7	*Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption*	3%
8.	*Black & White*	2%
9.	*Soldier of Fortune*	2%
10.	*Final Fantasy VIII*	2%

PC GAMER *GIVE-AWAY CONTEST RULES*

No purchase is necessary, and only one entry per household, per month, will be counted. Anyone can vote, but only U.S. residents are eligible to win prizes, and the offer is void in FL, RI, Puerto Rico, and where prohibited by law. Your chances of winning depend on the number of entries we receive.

THE PCG PLAYLIST

My game's better than your game!

Oh so much arguing to do, so little time. With all the arguing we did trying to decide the awards this month, you'd think we'd be sick of our own voices. But nope, we kept right on arguing — *QIII* or *UT*? *UT* or *QIII*? At this point, who cares? Just shut up already!



GAZ Myself, Greg, and Jeremy formed a trifecta of frogliciousness this month as we delivered some hearty slaps to those clueless clowns over at *PC Exaggerator* in *Quake III Arena* CTF. Time after time, they failed to get it done — oh, and guys, you still owe us the beer you wagered on that last game....



LISA My family has been playing *Let's Get the Flu!*. First, we attend a family function at which there's a bunch of kids running around. Then, we discover that one of them has a 104 fever! Next, Dean, Alex, or I start coughing, get a fever, and end up in bed for three days. Fun for the whole family!



DAN I've been playing many hours of *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake III Arena*. I've also been getting in some heavy doses of *Close Combat: Battle of the Bulge*. But mostly I've just playing nursemaid to Vedomen (*an irksome task that no one envies, but someone has to take care of the whining fool — Ed.*).



SMOKE I've taken a break from my *High Heat 2001* games to regain my once legendary *Quake* skills. I've also rediscovered my love of *RollerCoaster Tycoon*, thanks to the awesome add-on, *Corkscrew Follies*. I can't recommend it highly enough (and hey, check out Eyewitness for a chance to win your very own copy!).



LI It was a slew of sequels for me this month. I got in some *Freespace 2* action, a little *Age of Empires II*, some *Dungeon Keeper 2*, and a bit of *SWAT 3* — all the big ones that I felt I had neglected since their release. Of course, I still had to get my *Rogue Spear* fix. It's all about the Kosovo mission, baby!



JEREMY Someone around here has to give it up for the classics, and thus, I've been spending my time flipping and tilting on the new Pro Pinball game, *Fantastic Journey*. Pinball fans know the wizards at Empire are the best when it comes to the art of pinball, and the latest table ranks with the best of them.



DEAN To satisfy my killing urges, I keep loading up *Unreal Tournament*, which is an incredible shooter. The weapons are intense (and balanced, unlike *Quake III*), the environments are cool, and the bots are tough as nails. I keep trying to like *Quake III*, but it's just so poor in comparison.



JAY I couldn't be bothered with my PC this month. Why should I, when the best game ever, *Gran Turismo 2*, was released a few weeks ago? PC developers have a lot of catching up to do if they hope to release a racing game that even comes close to the amount of gaming brilliance in this package. Fools.



GREG Even with all the great new games we've gotten in recently, I must admit that I've been playing a ton of the original *Diablo* in recent weeks. I think it's that I just can't wait for the sequel, but even so, playing the first one all over again is making me even more hungry to taste fresh meat.


Actual game fighters.
FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE!
ENLIST!


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SO HOW WAS IT FOR YOU?

The past year in PC gaming saw the return of old classics, the re-invention of familiar ideas, and the creation of some totally new ones. It was, undeniably, a year of excellence — and it made our task of selecting the best of the best even tougher than usual. But — hey — we got it done, and now present the only gaming awards story you'll need to read this year....

THE SIXTH ANNUAL PC GAMER AWARDS



GAME OF THE YEAR

SIERRA

HOMEWORLD

The last two years of the millennium (sorry, 2001-freaks) were looking to become dangerously stagnant ones for real-time strategy. What was, just a few years ago, a vibrantly energetic and exciting new genre, was showing disturbing signs of settling into a comfortable (read: boring) maturity. Sure, *StarCraft* and *Age of Empires II* both impressed, but they did so within the rigid confines of the RTS rulebook — and even the mighty Westwood, who pioneered the genre, stumbled badly by utterly failing to innovate with the long-awaited *Command & Conquer: Tiberian Sun*. It seemed, for a while, as though real-time strategy had nothing significantly new to offer.

But there's a theory which states that evolution occurs not in gradual stages but in giant leaps, and *Homeworld* is the proof. Relic Entertainment's ambitious, audacious space epic had been wowing audiences at trade shows for years with its incredible scenes of fleet-scale stellar combat in 3D space, but many observers were skeptical that such a dynamic presentation could be married to a workable game design. Any doubts were dismissed when the finished product finally arrived — not only did the marriage work, it totally changed our understanding of how real-time strategy games could be presented and played.

Telling the story of a nomadic race of spacefarers travelling across the cosmos to rediscover their mythic planet of origin, *Homeworld* challenges the player to construct, supply, and command a fleet of fighters, battlecraft, and support vessels centered around a pivotal mothership as it ploughs through the vastness of space in a series of story-based, interdependent missions. Most of the real-time staples are evident — collect and manage resources, research and build ships and technology, defend the base, control units in battle — but represented in such a way as to utterly redefine the RTS experience. Ships move and fight in true 3D space, but that third dimension is handled so competently as to make tactical awareness a breeze. A minimal, often invisible interface makes command simple while helping players forget that this is just a game — immersion is absolute.



And aesthetically, *Homeworld* simply stuns. The camera zooms and sweeps across the action with such cinematic impact that you'd almost believe Relic had hired a Director of Photography. And the wonderful soundtrack, ranging from serene choral orchestrations to powerful ambient themes, made the deep-space setting seem all the more lonely and real.

On top of all this, *Homeworld* remains a challenging, addictive strategy game. Resources are carried over from mission to mission, requiring the player to think about long-term strategy, not just surviving the next battle. And while the single-player game is short, the excellent multiplayer mode more than makes up for this. *Homeworld* is as worthy a Game of the Year winner as there has ever been — now we can only hope that other developers will follow Relic's lead and continue to surprise us with creative re-interpretations and re-inventions of familiar themes.

Our two runners-up are both winners in their individual categories. *System Shock II* posed an interesting dilemma by being insanely addictive while almost too scary to continue playing, and *Half-Life: Opposing Force* makes history by becoming the first expansion pack to be considered for Game of the Year. Yes, it really is that good. Congratulations, all — you deserved it.



WINNER

THE RUNNERS-UP



Half-Life: Opposing Force



System Shock 2

BEST ACTION GAME

RED STORM ENTERTAINMENT

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX: ROGUE SPEAR





In a year that saw the release of both *Quake III Arena* and *Unreal Tournament*, it might strike many as a bit of a surprise to see our Action Game of the Year award go to a game at least two giant steps backward in graphical quality. But in this case, it's like the good-hearted gal who wins the pageant against her better-looking stepsisters; Red Storm Entertainment's *Rogue Spear* deserves the win hands down.

Why? Well, mainly it's the countless hours the entire *PC Gamer* team pumped into the game, deeply immersed in the cautious, demanding crucible of tactical close combat. The revolutionary innovation of the original *Rainbow Six* was that it turned the first-person focus away from frantic deathmatching and toward a slower, more intelligent, more demanding style of play. *Rogue Spear* took that philosophy and dialed it up several notches.

Not only do you have to know where to point a gun, you have to know how to plan an assault in advance of the actual fireworks. You need to coordinate the movements of an entire team. You need to communicate closely with squadmates. You need to equip each team member for the specific demands of each mission. You have to be aware of the safety of civilian hostages. And above all, you have to never forget that one bullet is all it takes to kill.

Our cooperative team missions were some of the best multiplayer sessions we had all year, but even as a single-player-only experience, *Rogue Spear* is well worth the money. There are few games (actually, *Team Fortress Classic* is probably the only one) that provide a more satisfying feeling of accomplishment after having methodically swept a level clear of terrorist scum (or *PC Accelerator* editors, for that matter).

Listen to us now and believe us a year from now, when the best action games are those that incorporate squad elements, pre-mission setup, and sound tactics. You'll look back at this award and say, "Geez, those guys at *PC Gamer* were really ahead of the curve on this one." Congratulations, Red Storm...in a loud market, you made the quiet revolution.

And now onto the runners-up, both of which came very close to winning the action award outright — this was definitely the toughest category to judge this year. *Unreal Tournament* is a brilliant multiplayer game that blew its main rival *Quake III* away with awesome bots, graphics, game types, and online functionality. And Sierra Studios' *SWAT 3* just got pipped to the post by *Rogue Spear* for the crime of not offering any multiplayer modes. Instead, it limited itself to a single-player campaign — but what a campaign: graphically, environmentally, and tactically, it was unsurpassed among action games this year.

PERSONAL BEST



"1999 was all about 3D action goodness for me. Between *Team Fortress Classic*, *Unreal Tournament*, *Rogue Spear*, *SWAT 3*, *Quake III Arena*, and *Half-Life: Opposing Force*, I spent the whole year absorbed in first-person madness. From the tense sniper action of *Rogue Spear* and *TFC* to the all-out carnage of *Unreal Tournament*, I just couldn't get enough. And even though I was disappointed by *Quake III*, I was pleased to complete my mastery of the Quake trilogy by bitch-slapping my hapless *PC Gamer* cohorts in the Arena Eternal."

—GARY WHITTA

THE RUNNERS-UP



SWAT 3



Unreal Tournament

Sound goods.



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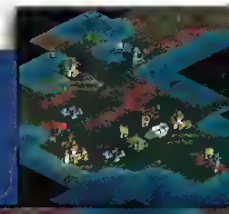
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BEST TURN-BASED STRATEGY GAME

SID MEIER'S ALPHA CENTAURI

FIRAXIS





If there's one name in the field of computer geme design that stands out above all others, it's Sid Meier — the man's resume reads like a list of PC Gaming's Greatest Hits. Such revered recognition, though, can be a hefty cross to bear; so much is expected of each new game bearing Meier's neme above the title that fears of a disappointment always loom large. But it seems as though Meier hasn't let all the acclaim go to his head just yet; *Alpha Centauri* ranks as one of his strongest games to date. Building on a rock-solid foundation, this pseudo-sequel to the seminal *Civilization II* takes that near-perfect turn-based gameplay to new heights — and a new planet.

One of the paths to victory in *Civilization II* was to construct a spaceship and lead your people to the stars. Though you could continue your earthly game after echieving this awesome feat, you had to rely on your imagination as to the fate of your off-world colonizers.. and that's where *Alpha Centauri* comes in. After choosing to play as one of seven different factions (each with its own agenda end value system), you must deal with the challenges posed by rival factions as well as by the planet's inhospitable terrain and indigenous life. Multiple victory conditions (many of which have nothing to do with military might) and e convincing diplomacy model help to provide the game with more depth than its predecessors, while the streamlined interface makes controlling your burgeoning population even more efficient.

Though not as instantly accessible as the Civilization games (let's face it, we can all relate to a technology tree that features advances such as the wheel, writing, and gunpowder much more readily than the esoteric high-tech paths featured in *Alpha Centauri*), a small time investment in familiarizing yourself with the alien setting will be handsomely rewarded. Many of the play mechanics will be familiar to fans of Meier's earlier games, but even newcomers should have no problem coming to grips with it. Elegant, addictive and thought-provoking, *Alpha Centauri* hes set a new standard for this venerable genre.

Despite its receiving the highest review score ever given by *PC Gamer*, *Alpha Centauri* didn't just have a carefree stroll in the park on its way to winning the award for best turn-besed strategy game. two other contenders put up one hell of a fight and should not be overlooked by fans of the genre.

Age of Wonders, developed by Triumph Studios and published by Gathering of Developers, took the tired fantasy-based theme we've seen time and again and breathed new life into it. The battles are truly epic, the magic system fresh and exciting, and the graphics beautifully detailed. What more could you ask for?

Our second runner-up, *Worms Armageddon*, is the sequel to last year's outright winner of this category, *Worms 2*. Developer Team 17 put smiles on our faces by bringing back those lovable creepy crawlers for another round of destruction, adding even more weird and wonderful ways to deal death. New worm powers also add to the already deep strategy that this amazing, amusing game has to offer.

PERSONAL BEST



"There are only so many awards to go around, which means that every year, a few worthy games get left out of the festivities. Try as I might, I just couldn't convince my fellow editors that *Thief: The Dark Project* deserved to be recognized for its inventive take on the first person shooter genre. I love a good game of *Quake III Arena* or *Half-Life*, but for me, *Thief* was the game that made me appreciate this genre all over again."

—ROB SMOLKA

THE RUNNERS-UP



Age of Wonders



Worms Armageddon

BEST REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME

MICROSOFT

AGE OF EMPIRES II

THE AGE OF KINGS

This time last year the real-time strategy genre was looking a little stagnant. Things hadn't progressed that much since *StarCraft*, and we were being pounded by one uninspired knock-off after another. But now, in the year 2000, we can safely say that RTS gaming has rebounded big-time, and sensational titles like *Homeworld* and *Age of Empires II: The Age of Kings* are the reason why.

In keeping with our policy that the Game of the Year cannot compete in individual award categories, we found ourself charged with the task of determining what was the best real-time strategy game of the year that wasn't *Homeworld*. Fortunately, Microsoft and Ensemble Studios had conspired to make our task not at all difficult.

Age of Empires II takes everything we know about the real-time strategy genre and polishes it, and polishes it, and then polishes it some more. It doesn't try to reinvent the genre like *Homeworld*; instead it takes the RTS formula we know and love to a higher level than ever before seen. In terms of number of units available, number of races to play as, and how large and varied the technology tree is, *Age of Empires II* has more to offer than any other game out there. Last year's real-time strategy winner *StarCraft* was praised for balancing three distinct races; *Age of Empires II* boasts no less than 13 different civilizations, all wonderfully balanced against each other, and all within the game's evolving age-based design.

Not only is *Age of Empires II* a deep, fulfilling real-time strategy game, it's also a work of art. The amount of visual detail put into all the units and structures is unrivaled anywhere in gaming, and the animation is amazing, right down to the day-to-day life of your commonfolk; you'll see villagers kill sheep and prepare them for food, fishermen cast nets and pull in their catch of the day...every little action combines to create a believable, immersive little world you to create, control, and ultimately become irretrievably lost in. Wrap all this visual luster around a tight, fascinating game design and you have the undisputed winner of *PC Gamer*'s Real-Time Strategy Game of the Year.

In another year, our runners-up may have walked away with the crown. *RollerCoaster Tycoon* revived the theme park sub-genre with its rock-solid design and addicting play. The fact that it was almost single-handedly created by one man (Chris Sawyer) makes it even more remarkable. *Dungeon Keeper 2* did justice to Peter Molyneux's original design while making the on-screen evil-doing even more fiendishly warped.

THE RUNNERS-UP



Dungeon Keeper 2



Rollercoastor Tycoon



WINNER



PERSONAL BEST



"In between deadlines early last year I was looking for a game to play. I began searching the web for something new, and I came across a game called *Age of Wonders*. It piqued my interest, and as it turned out, we had an early beta in the office. I played that disc until I was blue in the face (along with every subsequent build) until the final version arrived. While I love the final product, the most fun I had with the game was watching it evolve throughout the year."

—GREG VEDERMAN

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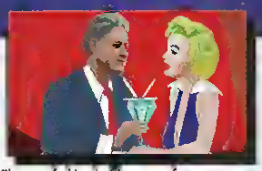
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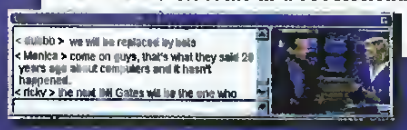
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BEST SPORTS GAME

3DO

HIGH HEAT BASEBALL 2000



WINNER

As much as *High Heat 2000* delivers on making you feel as if you're in control of your own Major League ball club, the true strength of its design is the all-important match-up between batter and pitcher. No other game, before or since, has portrayed this crucial area of the game as well as *High Heat 2000*. With a little practice, you'll be able to tell a ball from a strike, but somehow, it never becomes too easy. You'll have to retrain the "swing at every pitch" mentality that other baseball games have ingrained in you, but once this transition occurs you'll find that you can draw a realistic number of walks.

The rest of the package is nearly as strong, whichever way you choose to participate. The fielding controls are excellent, the stat tracking is robust, and the artificial intelligence of the CPU manager is as strong as you'll find in any sports game. If you have any interest in our national pastime, you'd be doing yourself a disservice if you don't give *High Heat Baseball 2000* a try.

Our first runner-up is *NBA Live 2000*, the latest game in this always-improving series from EA Sports. It speaks volumes about *High Heat 2000* that an improved version of last year's category winner could only muster a second place finish this year. Don't let that stop you from picking up this incredibly fun basketball title, though; the on-court play is the best in the business thanks to a major improvement of the computer AI, and the franchise mode is as much fun as the actual gameplay.

Our second runner-up is *NHL 2000*. EA Sports' beloved hockey series regained a bit of its former glory this year (it won this category in both 1997 and 1998) thanks to improved AI, the disappearance of the super-goalies that plagued last year's game, and some of the best production values around. Arcade-style hockey just doesn't get any batter.

THE RUNNERS-UP



NBA Live 2000

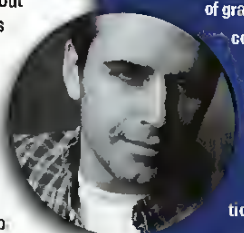


NHL 2000

The battle for top sports game of 1999 was a fiercely contested one, as perennial favorite EA Sports released some impressive updates to its many long-running series. In the end, though, it was 3DO and developer Team .366 that won our hearts with their standout baseball title, *High Heat Baseball 2000*. The *1999* edition had already established itself as king of the diamond when it came to on-field play, but nothing could have prepared us for the sophomore edition, which marked the series' transformation into one of the most complete sports sims on the market.

Instead of just delivering a great game of arcade baseball — which it absolutely does — *High Heat 2000* went several extra steps, giving those who prefer to play the role of general manager or dugout skipper the chance to live out their baseball fantasies. One of the game's best features is the three levels of minor leagues you have to manage (or not — you can opt to have the CPU take control) while in career mode. There are few things more enjoyable in sports gaming than watching that young stud in the low minors work his way up through the ranks to have a Hall of Fame career for your club

PERSONAL BEST



"Team Fortress Classic was the most significant game of the year for me. Its combination of graphics, design, and team coordination elevate it far above and beyond the typical shooter. Stalking online foes with my sniper dot was (and remains) a source of endless satisfaction. Other games look prettier, run smoother, and sound better, but *TFC* is still my drug of choice."

—DAN MORRIS

BEST ROLEPLAYING GAME

ELECTRONIC ARTS

SYSTEM SHOCK 2



It was no easy task for a sequel to live up to the legacy of 1994's *System Shock*, the original's innovations shook up roleplaying for good. Crafting a suspenseful story, deep character elements, action, puzzle-solving, and flat-out ambient dread, *System Shock* was a PC game that took interactive storytelling to new heights.

Five years later, *System Shock 2* arrived without the input of Warren Spector, the original's guiding light. But it didn't skip a beat in continuing the story of the psychotic artificial intelligence SHODAN. In this installment, players could begin as a member of one of several different military branches, which allowed for a surprisingly deep level of character customization.

But whether you choose to enter the game as a marine, psionic agent, or computer hacker, the thrills — and chills — come thick and fast. Ghosts of murdered officers haunt the corridors of the derelict starship on which you find yourself trapped. Shambling mutants chase you everywhere, hungry for flesh. And nowhere is safe from the insidious voice of SHODAN, whose disguise of support lurches halfway through the game into an unmitigated cackling malice.

Employing a variety of stunning audio tricks to pull you into the gameworld, *System Shock 2* does a better job than any other game of submerging you in a gripping, cinematic experience...yes, even more so than the staggeringly atmospheric *Half-Life*. You hoard ammunition as if it's gold, in desperate fear of running out.

There are times when you approach closed doors and you hesitate before entering, not quite sure you want to see what's on the other side. In short, this game brings real fear to the PC, it's a genuine suspense thriller of the first order, and a worthy winner of our RPG award.

Moving onto the runners-up. *Planescape Torment* is Interplay's follow-up to the hugely successful *Baldur's Gate*, and the RPG gurus at Black Isle Studios didn't lose a step in transferring BioWare's smart game engine to an even bigger and better universe (see review on page 82). Playing as a nameless creature who is resurrected each time he dies, *Planescape: Torment* throws innovative ideas at you from the get-go (case in point: a hovering, talking skull that serves as a sidekick). With bigger and much more ornate graphics than *Baldur's Gate*, breathtaking environments, and open-ended gameplay twists, *Planescape: Torment* is AD&D-style roleplaying at its finest.

Ultima IX: Ascension got knocked hard around the industry for its bug-infested release. But in the fashionable rush to slam Origin for the bugs, far fewer people discovered the brilliant RPG that lay beneath the furor. The fact is that on a top system with bug patches applied, *Ultima IX* is one of the best roleplaying games of all time. If it had been released without those bugs, it would have run away with this year's award — something for all game publishers to bear in mind this coming year.

PERSONAL BEST



"My most memorable gameplaying experiences of the past year were with *Tom Clancy's Rogue Spear* and in particular Operation Lost Thunder. Sneaking through the rain-soaked streets of that ruined Kosovo town with my fellow *PC Gamer* editors, I found myself more immersed than in any other game this year. The first time I played Lost Thunder, I lost an entire team to that damn sniper in the bell tower — I took more pleasure in offing that sniper with a double-tap to the back of the head than any other videogame kill in history, but it came at a hefty price. Sometimes I still wake up screaming at the imagined squad of a Russian Dragonov rifle."

—LI KUO

THE RUNNERS-UP



Planescape: Torment



Ultima IX: Ascension

BEST MULTIPLAYER GAME

VALVE

HALF-LIFE: TEAM FORTRESS CLASSIC



It's free. It's basically just a bunch of modifications to a pre-existing title. And it's also our Multiplayer Game of the Year. *Team Fortress Classic*, to state it bluntly, put a lot of development teams to shame this year. It was more fun and more addictive than any other multiplayer-only title released in 1999, and didn't cost owners of *Half-Life* a single penny. How's *that* for customer service?

Almost all of the levels provide a gripping and — really important point here — *uniquely flavored* style of play. At various points throughout *TFC*, you'll encounter demolitions teams knocking holes out from underneath your defenses; spies who infiltrate your team and then sabotage you; snipers that blow your head open from vast distances, heavy weapons guys who trudge around like tanks-on-legs; and all of it ingeniously balanced into an almost bottomless pool of gameplay.

The brilliance of *TFC* reaches its summit with "The Hunted," the assassination/escort contest that quite frankly ranks right up there with crack cocaine as one of the most habit-forming substances on the planet. One poor player tries to survive as a panicked-looking civilian, while e cunning cadre of snipers sets ambush after ambush and a valiant squad of bodyguards tries to clear a route and "deliver the package" to a waiting getaway jeep. This level is essentially a perfect multiplayer design, from beginning to end, regardless of which role you're playing, and was by far the most-played game at *PC Gamer* in 1999.

As the foundation for what will ultimately become *Team Fortress 2*, which will incorporate multi-resolution meshing, voice synthesis, and leading-edge skeletal animations, *TFC* is basically a road map to perfect multiplayer action gaming. Nothing else held our attention as long, made us sweat so much, or brought such big smiles to our faces.

THE RUNNERS-UP


Starsiege: Tribes


Unreal Tournament

Sierra's *Tribes* is a worthy runner-up in this category; the rabid community that still thrives around the game is a testament to just how popular this kind of gameplay is going to be.

Our second runner-up is *Unreal Tournament*. It beats *Quake III Arena* hands-down (see pages 84 through 87 for an up-close examination). Its new gameplay modes (particularly Assault and Domination) pave new ground for the classic FPS. Deathmatch, we hardly knew ye....

BEST SIMULATION

EMPIRE INTERACTIVE

MIG ALLEY



In sharp contrast to the bumper crop of '98, 1999 was a surprisingly lean time for quality simulations. In fact, the year was almost over before UK developer Rowan turned out *MiG Alley*, a lovingly rendered and superbly engineered look back at the Korean War's early jet era. The game's outstanding flight modeling, butter-smooth graphics, and rich dynamic campaign structure earns it our nod as the best simulation of the year.

The highest compliment to be paid to *MiG Alley*'s flight model is that it comes from an era that few modern sim designers know about. In sharp contrast to the slick, supersonic age of Tomcats and Eagles, the fighters of the first real jet war were slow-moving, aerodynamically inefficient beasts, and the faithful re-creation of this far more challenging style of jet combat is the sim's greatest strength.

The graphics speak from themselves, from the seamlessness of the terrain right down to the customizable nose art. But Rowan didn't settle for just supplying a graphically impressive, realistic sim; the designers married it to a deep and immersive campaign system that brings a dynamic, constantly evolving war to the forefront of the flight-sim experience. As a result, you're never just taking a plane out for a hop; you're contributing to an overall war effort whose outcome is dependent on each mission's success or failure. This is the stuff sims should be made of.

This year's runners-up honors go to Looking Glass' *Flight Unlimited III* and SSI's *Flanker 2.0*. The former set a lofty new standard for photorealistic terrain graphics in a general aviation sim, drawing huge swatches of the American landscape in brilliant detail. The shift from flight path to airport approach to landing is as smooth as it has ever been in any flight sim. Meanwhile, *Flanker 2.0* delivered some of the most authentic flight physics ever created for a PC combat jet simulator. Granted, it's not everyone's cup of tea, and even veteran simmers find it a challenge to master every vagary of the Su-27. But for sheer authenticity, it can't be topped.

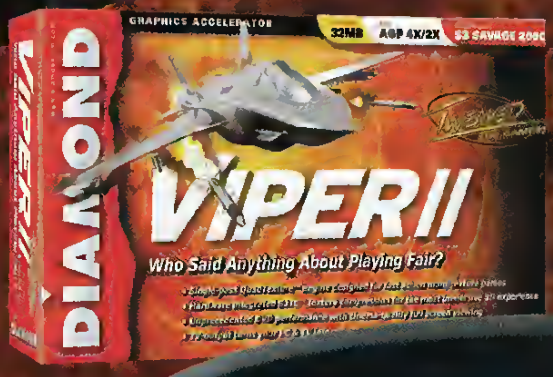
THE RUNNERS-UP


Flanker 2.0


Flight Unlimited III

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1



General Veers

Served: Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul, Battle of Hoth (wounded), Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (captured).

2



2nd Lieutenant Gorga

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).

3



Sergeant Krung

Served: Battle of Hoth, Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (missing in action).

4



Sergeant Major Corillon

Served: Battle of Yavin (wounded), Battle of Sarapin (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (killed).

5



Lieutenant Major Antilles

Served: Battle of Yavin, Battle of Sarapin, Battle of Ruul (wounded), Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (wounded).

6



1st Lieutenant Spiker

Served: Battle of Abridon, Battle of Coruscant, Battle of Endor, Battle of Tatooine (promoted).

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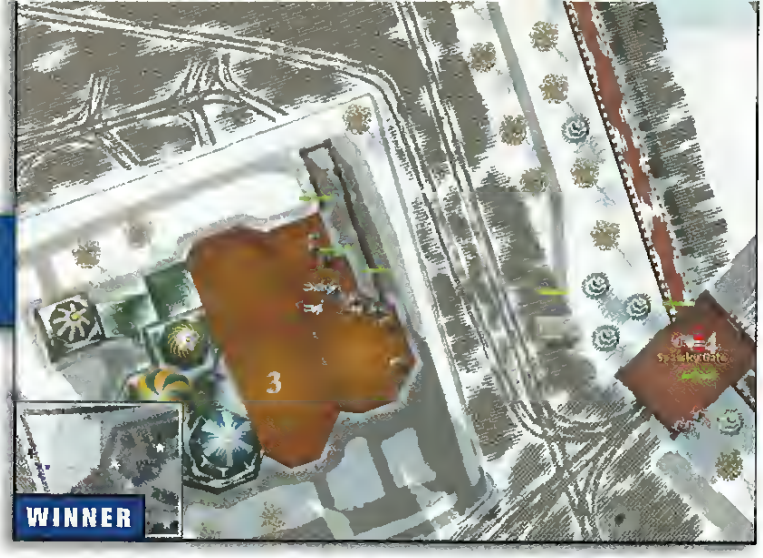
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BEST WARGAME

MICROSOFT

CLOSE COMBAT III



This precedent-shattering series just goes from strength to strength. Atomic Games continues to prove that games don't have to be rendered in 3D to look sensational, nor sequels egregiously "different" from their worthy predecessors. *Close Combat III: The Russian Front* once again demonstrates what these games do better than any others: vividly recreate the fluidity and chaos of real combat without compromising playability. The Russian Front and the Close Combat system were *made* for each other, and the scale of the historical events inspired the designers to new heights of imagination.

Bravely simulating the entire war, from 1941 to 1945, *Close Combat III* offered really big maps (sometimes triple the size of those found in the previous games), which in turn opened up new vistas for maneuvering. The basic interface remained the same, but was redesigned into a tamer format. The ability to number units for instant hot-key accessibility was a welcome innovation. Numerous interesting tactical options were implemented (such as the deadly "ambush" mode, way-point designation, and off-map artillery support) and a huge inventory of new weapons added zest to the already-intense visual element. Not only was this the strongest *Close Combat* title yet, it was also a game that delivered on all its implied promises and deserves be honored for that, if nothing else.

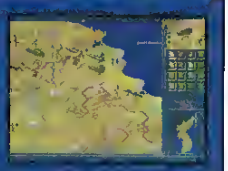
As for our worthy runners-up: TalonSoft's *The Operational Art of War II* expanded and consolidated the status of Norm Koger's encyclopedic epic, supplying tons of new scenarios and upgrading the immense custom-scenario editor. Koger deserves some kind of award for his intense follow-through of patches and prompt response to consumer input. No serious wargaming library should be without a copy, preferably the most recent edition.

Meanwhile, Jane's *Fleet Command* proved to be the perfect modern naval game for thousands of PWSHFOHTPH ("People Who Still Haven't Figured Out How to Play *Harpoon*"). It combined dramatic 3D action sequences with complex operational demands, yet somehow made the two elements fit together smoothly. For gamers who love naval simulations, it's usually a long thirst between drinks, and *Fleet Command* was remarkably quenching — a much better product, in fact, than many gave it credit for at the time of its release.

THE RUNNERS-UP



Fleet Command



The Operational Art of War II

BEST RACING GAME

ACCLAIM

RE-VOLT



Who would have thought that a pack of unassuming little R/C cars would wind up beating every other racing game to the finish line? Well, that's exactly what happened this year. Representing an exceptional balance of realism and arcade thrills, Acclaim's *Re-Volt* is a classic finesse game, requiring the player to cut corners within centimeters of walls and curbs, whereby pushing adrenaline levels into overdrive. The AI is smart and relentless, and each map is rendered in stunning, extraordinary detail. If physics are your game, *Re-Volt* easily encroaches onto simulation territory. Prepare for spot-on accuracy with every turn, slide, jump, and landing. Add a set of balanced power-ups and bonus modes of play like Clockwork Carnage and Stunt Track racing, and there's no doubt: *Re-Volt* is the best racing game of the past twelve months.

Our runner-up, Microsoft's *Midtown Madness*, is no slouch either. Imagine thrashing a city bus or New VW Beetle through a fully rendered virtual Chicago, and you get the idea. Complete with landmarks, savvy pedestrians, traffic, and a working stoplight system, *Midtown Madness* lays down a racing milestone by creating a living, breathing, 3D city — and then letting you trash it. It's tremendous fun.

THE RUNNER-UP



Midtown Madness

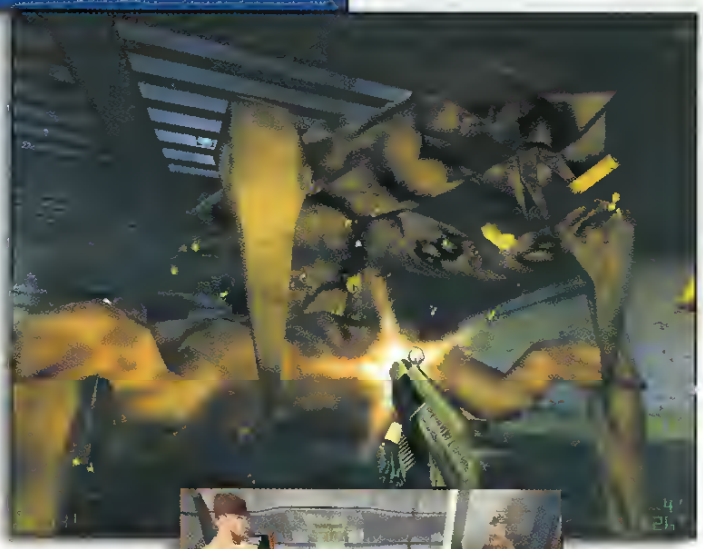


BEST EXPANSION PACK

SIERRA

HALF-LIFE: OPPOSING FORCE







This was this year's easiest category to judge, by a mile. Normally the expansion category is hardly our annual awards issue's most compelling — a new flight-sim campaign here, a few extra dragons and spells there — but hardly anything that goes so far as to warrant serious consideration for our over-riding Game of the Year award!

It was all so very different in 1999. Just as Valve's *Half-Life* re-set the standard for first-person action games a year before, Gearbox's *Opposing Force* woke us up to just what was possible with an expansion pack. Big enough and different enough to almost be labeled a full sequel, *OpFor* (as it has become affectionately known) is ingeniously set at the same time as the events of the original game, with the player cast as one of the "bad" soldiers sent in to clean up the mess created by Gordon Freeman.

What follows is a stunning reprise of the original game's atmospheric mix of action and interaction, as you'll work together with your army buddies to take on new breeds of pan-dimensional baddies, solve even more complex puzzles, and learn a whole new armory. And let's not forget the "all-star" multi-player maps that round out this stunning package. More played and enjoyed by the *PC Gamer* staff than most stand-alone games in the past year, *Opposing Force* kicks some serious ass.



SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN HARDWARE

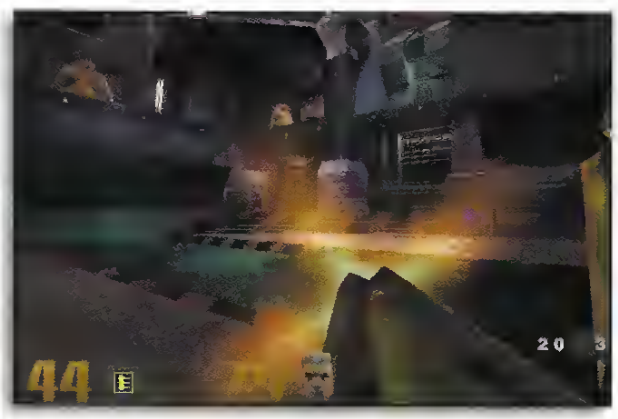
INTELLIEYE MICE

For the first time in *PC Gamer*'s history, our annual hardware award isn't going to a video card. Nor, for that matter, is it going to a set of speakers, a joystick, or even a sound card. Nope, this year, our coveted gong is going to a mouse — and you *are* going to be happy about it. Up until now, mouse technology has remained largely unchanged. But by replacing the standard mouse ball with a tiny digital camera system called the IntelliEye, Microsoft has changed the face of mousing forever. Not only do IntelliEye mice track far better than your average mouse, but because there aren't any moving parts, you'll never have to clean that horrid crud out of their innards, either! Heck, these mice are well worth the investment for that one reason alone! Get one. Get one now.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN GRAPHICS

QUAKE III ARENA

***Quake III* might not be** quite as much fun to play as *Unreal Tournament*, but that certainly doesn't mean that there's nothing spectacular about id Software's latest frag-fest. Sporting such eye-popping graphics candy as 32-bit textures and color, smooth (bezier) curves, wicked fog effects, and a dizzying array of far-out and frightening player models and skins, the astounding work of id's John Carmack, John Cash, Adrian Carmack, Kevin Cloud, Paul Steed, and Kenneth Scott set a new high-water mark in 3D graphics this year. Now, if some company or individual out there is up to the challenge of making an entertaining single-player game with this engine, we should all be able to die happy.

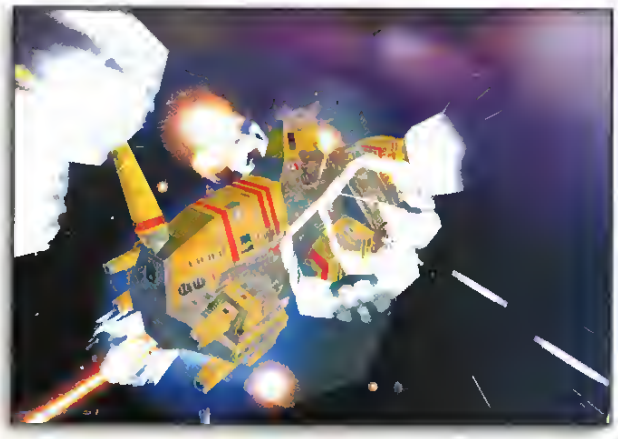




SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN SOUND

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

***System Shock 2* achieved** new levels of creepiness in 1999, with sound design that chilled gamers to their very marrow. The echoes of footsteps down passageways, the moans of disembodied spirits in torment, and the voice of SHODAN, which oscillated between that of a snarling death-goddess and an innocent laughing girl. The achievement is nothing short of a landmark, and should provide developers with the best example of how a game can entrance without any graphics considerations whatsoever.



SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN ART DIRECTION

HOMEWORLD

***Quake III Arena* may boast** the year's best graphical trickery, but in terms of presenting an all-round visual experience, nothing can hold a candle to *Homeworld*. Its beautiful, graceful images of sleek spacecraft moving against an inky void inspired awe from the first frame, and the space battles are artfully staged and presented, with each craft dispersing its own colored vapor trails, the dogfights play out like some cosmic ballet. *Homeworld*'s graphics draw the player hypnotically into its rich gameworld, and leaves images that resonate in the mind long after play is over. Beautiful.

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN MUSIC

HOMEWORLD

If music truly is, as Shakespeare said, the food of love, then Relic Entertainment's *Homeworld* seduced us more than any other game last year with its grandly operatic and downright stirring score. The scope of the tastefully compiled soundtrack ranges from a solemn a cappella choir, who introduce the mothership as she drifts from the scaffold, to an eerily serene ambient theme that evokes the solitude of space, to vocal cries and battle drums that rival the intensity of Peter Gabriel's *Passion* or Ennio Morricone's work on *The Mission*. In a medium in which music is all too often an ill-conceived afterthought, *Homeworld*'s score stands out as a serious and respectful backdrop to an equally epic story.



SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT IN INNOVATION

STARSIEGE: TRIBES

Dynamix's sprawling, online gaming experiment was the first serious attempt at creating a first-person multiplayer experience that brought more to the table than just repetitive deathmatch and capture the flag. It succeeded brilliantly, giving tired 3D gamers a whole new world of jetpacking soldiers and vehicles to play with, beautiful open-air vistas to play in, and all-new rules of engagement to live by. What's more, it wrapped everything up inside some airtight networking code and what is still today one of the best self-contained online interfaces we've seen. *Tribes* re-wrote the rules of online combat, and as such is a deserved winner of this year's Innovation award.



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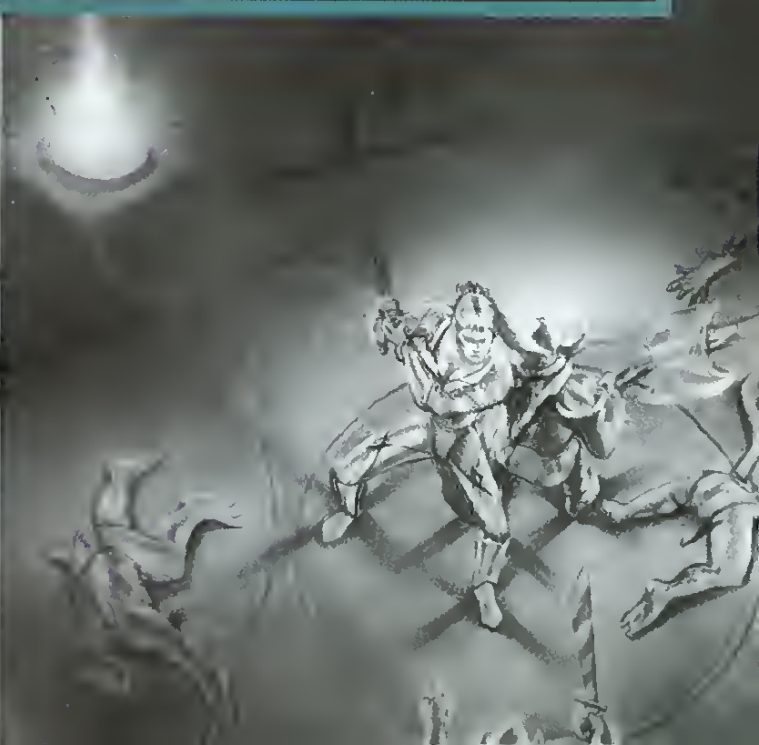
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CHRIS TAYLOR'S DUNGEON SIEGE: THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS





BY COMBINING THE MOST EXCITING ELEMENTS OF REAL-TIME STRATEGY WITH THE GRIPPING STORIES AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT OF FANTASY ROLEPLAYING, THE CREATOR OF TOTAL ANNIHILATION IS OUT TO CREATE A HYBRID THAT WILL REDEFINE BOTH GENRES — AND KNOCK DIABLO OFF ITS LOFTY PERCH

BY STEPHEN POOLE

Chris Taylor doesn't invent your favorite gaming genres — he just makes them better. And that's precisely what he and his team at Gas Powered Games in Kirkland, Washington, intend to do for fantasy roleplaying games with their debut title *Dungeon Siege*.

Breathing new life into existing genres isn't anything new for Taylor. For 15 years, he's been the driving force behind some of PC gaming's classics. At the tender age of 21, he founded Distinctive Software — now Electronic Arts Canada — and helped deliver two of Accolade's earliest hit titles, *Hardball 2* and *Test Drive 2*. The company's next game, *4D Boxing*, was one of the first PC games to use motion-capture technology (Taylor says he's "90 percent sure it was the first, even though we created it with Scotch tape and baling wire"), and evan today it's the undisputed champion of PC boxing games. After working on a couple of other baseball titles, Taylor turned his sights on something entirely different: real-time strategy gaming.

Like millions of other gamers, Taylor had snatched up *Command & Conquer* — only to find it filled with problems that annoyed him to no end. "I was sure that with *C&C* Westwood would fix all the stuff that bothered me — make units shoot as they retreated, have terrain that interacted properly with projectiles — but it turned out they hadn't addressed any of that stuff," he says. "And there was one other thing besides all this that I wanted in an RTS that I wasn't getting out of *C&C* — intensity and excitement, the kind of excitement you see in *Saving Private Ryan* during the Normandy invasion and there's stuff happening everywhere. Why not? That's what the computer can do! We can all play a paper game and move one unit at a time — and you could damn near simulate some of those RTS games on paper."

So Taylor took his dream of a 3D RTS game to Ron Gilbert at Humongous Entertainment (previously known for kiddie classics like *Putt-Putt Joins the Parade*), which led to the creation of Cavedog Entertainment — and it was Cavedog that brought us *Total Annihilation*, an instant classic that shouldered its way past a bevy of *C&C* wannabes by proving just how many crucial subtleties had been left unexplored in real-time strategy gaming. The game's 3D terrain added a true tactical element to combat by providing units perched on higher elavations with wider range of fire; trees could be used for covar, but they could also catch fire and destroy any units hiding in them; flying metal from explosions caused damage to nearby units, both friendly and enemy; units gained experience by surviving battles — these and many other features made *TA* the new king of the RTS hill by delivering a bent-for-hell intensity on a scale never before seen in a real-time affair.

SWORDS AND SORCERY — TIMES TEN

After the success at Cavedog, Taylor — along with Jacob McMahon and Bart Kijanka, both of whom played huge roles in the creation of *Total Annihilation* — left the company to form Gas Powered Games. The first item on their agenda: to create a roleplaying game that delivered all the adrenaline-soaked action of *Total Annihilation*, while stripping away some of the cumbersome conventions computer RPGs have accumulated over the years and replacing them with the best elements of real-time strategy gaming.

"Action RPGs get all of us more excited than a 'traditional' RPG, because in those games you play more slowly and methodically," says Taylor. "So we thought if we could bring the over-the-top intensity and excitement of *Total Annihilation* to an action-oriented RPG — your band of characters bursts into a room and *wham!*, bodies start flying, things catch on fire, enemies scream as they die — it would be a great way to go. And hey, we *know* how to do that! So let's marry some of this stuff."

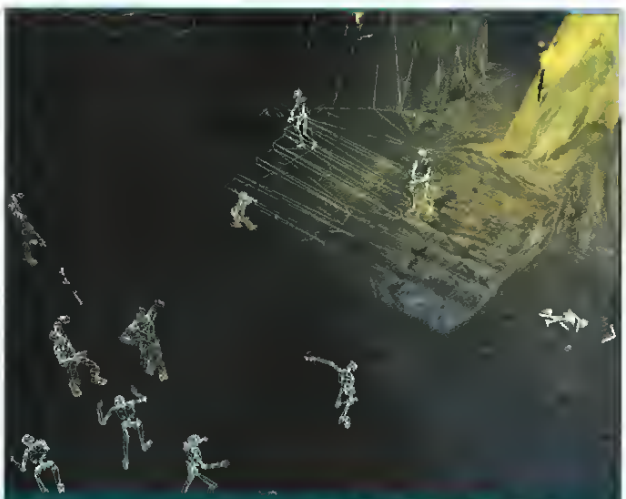
This proposed "marriage" of real-time strategy and roleplaying is, of course, *Dungeon Siege* — but as Gas Powered Games started work on the project they decided to set down three overarching goals they would keep in focus from start to finish. First, it would have to immerse the player from the very opening sequence and keep them *completely* immersed as long as they were playing the game. Second, the questing party would have to consist of multiple characters, each under the player's control, to make it feel like a true roleplaying adventure — that's where the RTS elemants play a major role. Lastly, they wanted to create an open-anded character system that didn't



A battle such as this one to clear a dungeon of skeletal warriors has the potential to become confusing for you. If things get too hectic with all the action, you can either slow down the game speed or pause the gameplay to issue orders and change weapons.

set traditional boundaries to hamper the way players might want to develop the members of their party.

Taylor and company are pretty serious — no, make that *very* serious — about all these points, particularly making sure the player is drawn into the experience from the very beginning. That's why the story that drives *Dungeon Siege* is essentially *hidden* from the player at the start of the game. Ask Taylor to describe the storyline, and you get a laugh followed by an answer that seems like a toss-off: "You play the role of a hero who must save the world," he says. "When the game starts you're attacked at your farmhouse and you have no idea of who's responsible — all you know is that a bunch of orc-like things ara out to kill you." Naturally, you'll learn more and more about the forces you're up against as you traverse the gameworld and assemble a party, but Taylor feels that this cinematic approach — show a couple of logos, then immediately pan in on the player working on his farm before all hell breaks loose — gets the player immediately into the game. It makes sense: why show the bad guy cackling with glee as he launches his odious schemes at the *start* of the game (a technique common in PC fantasy role-playing) when you can keep the player in suspense?



***Dungeon Siege*'s "weighted vertex" animation system created by Gas Powered Games doesn't require astronomical polygon counts for characters to achieve smooth movement — a good thing, considering how many characters might be battling on screen at any given time!**

But for Taylor, the single biggest stumbling block to player immersion or suspension of disbelief can be summed up in two words: loading screens. "Sitting there looking at a bar move across the screen reminds me that it's a computer game," he says. "I want to go *into* tha world and I want to *stay* there. So one of the design goals was to build e gigantic world that you could play through from beginning to end without aver waiting for a level to load. We're making indoor-outdoor transitions seamless — dissolving roofs when you go into buildings, going from an outdoor environment into a dungeon — just walking straight through without any pause." In other words, once you begin playing *Dungeon Siege* you'll *never* see a loading bar — or even wait more than a second or two as new terrain data is streamed into the game. Imagine playing for four or five hours non-stop without any type of interruptions as you move to a new "level," and you've got a small idea of just how crucial this concept really is.

This idea goes hand in hand with the awesome size of the *Dungeon Siege* gameworld. "We wanted to get away from was the flat terrain you see in '3D' games," Taylor says. "What a lot of games use now is a poly-mesh with vertices that are 'pulled' to make rolling hills — but you never see a steep cliff because there are a lot of technical reasons that make it very difficult to do. Typically those games have some type of maximum height limitations; our , design goal was to have a massively continuous 3D world *and* be able to go vertical — you walk into a dungeon, spiral down into the depths of the dungeon, and just when you're thinking you've gone a long way you realize you're only ten percent of the way in!"

What it all adds up to, says Taylor, is a true sense of adventure — something often missing from RPGs, "where you feel lika you're running back and forth from the town to the local dungeon — which just happens to be 78 feet away from town," he says. "We wented to create a sense of vastness that would make the player say, 'Whoa, I'm a helluva long way from home — I'm in deep!'"

You're In Control

Anyone who played Dungeons & Dragons knows that it's definitely a case of mora the merrier — as Taylor points out, "no one ever played D&D with a dungeon master and one player." But controlling a party containing five, six, seven, or ten people can pose some real control issues — and that's where the real-time strategy elements come into play. After fending off the initial attack end making your way to town, you'll be afforded the opportunity to bagin adding adventurers to your party — by either helping them out of a sticky situation or, later on, by paying them a ona-time fee. Once that happens, a world of possibilities begins to open up because of the options an RTS system of control brings to the table.

The first advantage is ease of use: all the usual RTS paradigms — shift-clicking to set groups, clicking and dragging, setting waypoints, point-and-click navigation — will be instantly familiar to thousands of gamers. From the oblique third-person perspective, you can then set formations, lay down waypoints, issue commands, and generally take complete charge of the situation. Even an RPG newbie will be able to master the situation in very short order.

But perhaps the most important benefit of such a control system is the ebility to split up your party. Besides the obvious tactical uses of splitting your force during combat situations, you'll be

Power to the People

The fact that users could create their own meps has given *Total Annihilation* the kind of longevity that all game developers dream of when creating a new product. "With *TA*, we left the door open for the Internet community to create their own content, and we're doing the same thing with *Dungeon Siege* — but on a much larger scale," says Chris Taylor. "Not only can you use our Siege Editor to build your own maps, but you can create your own spells and weapons and our system will ensure that the transfer of your deta to other players is fast and easy."

The challenge for Gas Powered Gemes was not only to meke it simple for users to design new levels, but also to build the type of gigantic worlds with jaw-dropping vertical topography that you don't see in other RTS titles. So the team took a new approech for its user editor, one that brings to mind such simple childhood pastimes as building with Legos or setting up an electric train set. The Siege Engine consists of a variety of components that you can literally "snap" together piece by piece to create an entire world from [illegible]. "You can lay down pieces very easily — I want cliffs, I want a valley, I want an open area for a town, I want a castle containing a dungeon — and in an amazingly short emount of time you can build a very large map," says Taylor. He's not blowing smoke, either: when the GPG team demonstrated *Dungeon Siege* for me, they showed me e huge map that an artist had created in *two hours*. And because the editor is capable of realistically handling objects on the vertical plane, Taylor says he's sure that somebody will realize that they could "build the Empire State building — with working elevators!"

Perheps even more exciting than the wonderfully simple level-creation system is the spell and weapon editor. By jumping into the text-based files that define the appearence and effects of spells end weepons, players can devise a new visual effect for a current spell — they could add a translucent, orbiting ball to an existing ball and heve it fire lightning bolts to the target, for instance — or build an entirely new spell from the ground up. It's e bit more difficult than snapping together map pieces, but the leerning curve is more than made up for by the possibilities such a feature will provide for the *Dungeon Siege* user community.

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able to send parties loaded with booty back to the last town you visited in order to pick up new items or sell stuff for cash — and, wonder of wonders, you won't be forced to make that tedious trip yourself! Once they get there, an image will pop up telling you they've arrived, and with a couple of clicks you're controlling them during their transactions and encounters with new NPCs. Not sure what lies over that ridge? Fine — pick a couple of party members you might consider expendable (Taylor likes to call them "red shirts," after the guys in the original "Star Trek" who invariably bit the dust) and have them scout it out for you, instantly switching to their position if trouble arises.

Another great thing about the ability to control sub-groups of party members and zip instantly to their location is that it opens up all sorts of vistas for mini-quests inside the game. Say you're about to cross a rickety bridge, and as half your party makes its way across the structure collapses and they fall into a river that carries them to an island. Now you're faced with the task of re-uniting your party — but the good news is that you'll be able to switch back and forth between the two groups to work out the solution. Oh, there's always the option of simply leaving them for dead and trying to pick up new friends somewhere else, but then new issues come into play: were they hauling all your valuables? Was your best magic user in the group that's stranded?

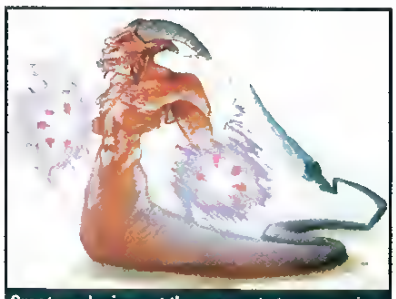
This type of control method seems wonderfully simple and obvious, yet the more you think about it, the more you realize just what it will allow Gas Powered Games to do in terms of puzzles, quests, and combat — especially when you look back at all the little touches that made *Total Annihilation* such an enthralling gaming experience.

No Boundaries

If the GPG team had a mantra, it would be this: no boundaries. "We're very passionate about not setting boundaries and rules for the player — we want them to be able to do *whatever* they want," says Taylor. "It's important because when you create a lot of rules and boundaries, everyone ends up playing the same way."

That's why you won't find a typical RPG character-creation system in *Dungeon Siege* — no questions to answer, no selection of what primary skill your character will have, no skill points to distribute, nada. "You start off the game as your single hero character, male or female, and are presented with choices," explains Taylor. "There's a magic scroll, there's a melee weapon, there's a bow — and that's how you start to mold and craft your character. And I absolutely believe this will be a total reflection of the player. They won't be making conscious decisions — they're just choosing from items." Such a system achieves two goals: it keeps you from digging through menus (which prevents you from being truly immersed in the experience, one of GPG's big no-nos), and it means your character will develop "organically" to reflect what sort of person you are, thanks to the way the game's Attribute system is structured.

"We thought if we could bring the over-the-top intensity and excitement of Total Annihilation to an action-oriented RPG, it would be a great way to go. And hey, we know how to do that! So let's marry some of this stuff." Chris Taylor



Creature designs at the concept stage promise to deliver some truly evil beasties.

All characters are rated in five attributes: Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity, Life, and Mana. The first three relate directly to skills: Strength directly affects your performance in Melee combat, Intelligence is vital for magic users, and Dexterity determines accuracy when using ranged weapons. Instead of saying "I'm a magic user — poof! I can cast spells!", *Dungeon Siege* lets you *become* a magic user the way you'd expect: by doing it. What's more, the system allows for sub-categories: a fighter who uses magic occasionally becomes a fighter-magic user, and vice-versa. This might sound like a little thing, but think about it: if you never let one of your magic users hone their fighting skills and thus increase their Strength rating, you could be in a real pickle if you're bum-rushed by a horde of skeletal warriors and all he has left are Healing spells!

The most intriguing attribute, though, is mana. Every character has a "mana-channeling rate" that determines how rapidly they draw mana from the environment, and it's something you'll want to keep a keen eye on whenever you acquire new members for your party. Let's say you hire a helper or "squire" with the intention of using him merely as a bearer to carry excess inventory items, but then notice that his mana-channeling rate is incredible — and you'll have acquired a party member who, if you give him the chance to use magic spells, could wind up being an extremely potent magic user. It's almost like scouting for talent in pro sports, and what's even cooler is that this extends to the corpses you find: you could expend a ton of mana to resurrect a pile of bones with a sword and armor on top and instantly gain a true Goliath of a fighter — or, conversely, discover that you've unwittingly brought a very evil (and grumpy) behemoth to life.

These aren't the only ways in which GPG is tweaking its nose at some traditional RPG conventions, either. Here's a good example: you enter a shop to pick up a new sword or suit of armor, plop down your hard-earned treasure, the item appears in your inventory — and



One of the more impressive features of the Siege Engine is the ability to create massive vertical cliffs — perfect for taking a look around the countryside or launching attacks with ranged weapons. Looks like our party can expect some company very soon....

"WE'RE VERY PASSIONATE ABOUT NOT SETTING BOUNDARIES AND RULES FOR THE PLAYER — WE WANT THEM TO BE ABLE TO DO *WHATEVER* THEY WANT. IT'S IMPORTANT BECAUSE WHEN YOU CREATE A LOT OF RULES AND BOUNDARIES, EVERYONE ENDS UP PLAYING THE SAME WAY." CHRIS TAYLOR

then you realize you should have bought another item. Well, that's a bit of bad news, because now that suit of armor you've owned for all of 10 seconds can be sold for only half its original value! This design is pervasive in roleplaying games, but you won't find it in *Dungeon Siege*: no sale is final until you actually leave the shop, and even then you'll have a grace period in which you can return it for a *full* refund. You'll even have a grace period after buying items from individuals strolling through town (though it won't be nearly as long as when you're dealing with shopkeepers). And if you've been frustrated at being forced to drop items because you didn't have enough inventory space, you'll love *Dungeon Siege*'s addition of pack mules: they carry a ton of stuff, and by having someone lead them to a town or fortress you can be turning a profit at the very same time you're exploring new sections of the world.

MEET ME IN THE DUNGEON

Having such a fine degree of control over computer characters is great, but any RPG fan will tell you that nothing beats playing with or against other people online. *Dungeon Siege* will feature both co-op and competitive modes: you can play through the single-player geme with fellow gamers joining your party, or you can opt for competitive play on smaller maps with specific goals. There might be a map with a castle in the middle, for instance, and two parties of human players will fight it out to reach a certain spot in the castle or gain control of a precious object for a specific length of time; other victory conditions could revolve around the player with the most points based on kills, number of artifacts and items collected, and so on. Whatever the game, the Host will set all the parameters for play.

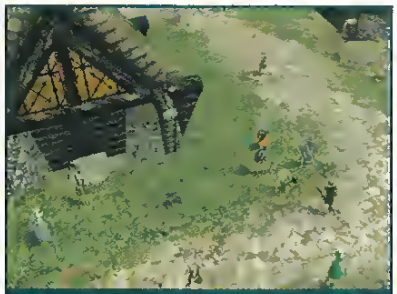
THE FORCES OF EVIL

Dungeon Siege aims for nothing less than roleplaying on an epic scale, and that includes the bestiary of monsters you'll encounter as you traverse the immense gameworld. Even at this early stage of development, the lineup of fiends is so inspiring that just a glance will give you the urge to gird yourself for battle.







Your party enters town in hopes of finding out why the Krug have taken over the gold mines. After gleaning information, you might want to hire a "helper" to carry any booty you acquire.

Taylor says that *Dungeon Siege* will be "playable over a LAN and the Internet. We use a client-server model, and offer what some call 'inside-out' matchmaking: it's not necessary to exit the geme and launch another program to find others to play against. This can all be done from inside the game. But we'll still offer all of the older methods of finding and launching games." Given that the game will be published by Microsoft, you can expect support via the MSN Gaming Zone.

Just as with *Total Annihilation*, there'll probably be a huge community of *Dungeon Siege* fans cranking out custom scenarios (see sidebar), but here again GPG has simplified the process of finding out just what the hell you're getting into when you join a user-created level. "When someone clicks on e game to join, they'll be told that the game hes been modified," Taylor says. "If you choose to download it, you can quit the game and read the text-based GAS file that's built when the user created the level and find out exactly how the game has been altered. And I wouldn't be surprised if some users created front-end menus that show you graphically what they've added to or modified in the game."

On top of all this, look forward to some state-of-the-art graphical effects in the completely 3D gameworld: true shadows (and I do mean *true* — really!), brilliant particle effects, colored vertex lighting, and some mind-blowing levels of detail — individual 3D weapon models lying on the ground, arrows that stay implanted in their target, raindrops bouncing off the ground, wind blowing snow or rain in the appropriate direction, and so much more. Even with the release months away, things are looking awfully good in the visual department, and Microsoft's exhaustive DirectX testing lab should ensure the game will run on e plethora of systems (a Pentium II 300 MHz will probably be the minimum CPU, however). But while Gas Powered Games' founders Taylor, McMehon, and Bijanka are justifiably proud of the game's technology, it really boils down to one thing: gameplay. "Technology and features must serve gameplay," says Taylor. "I don't like to add *anything* unless it adds value to the gameplay experience. We create games, not movies, novels, or Shakespearean plays. Give me gameplay, or give me death!"

Preach on, brother. Preach on.

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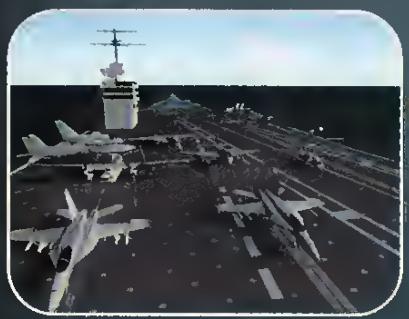
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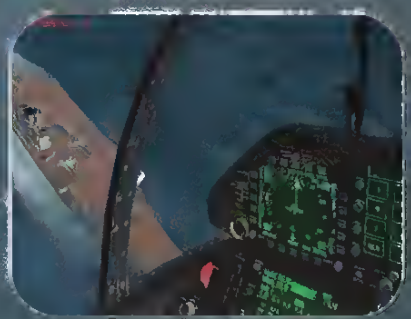
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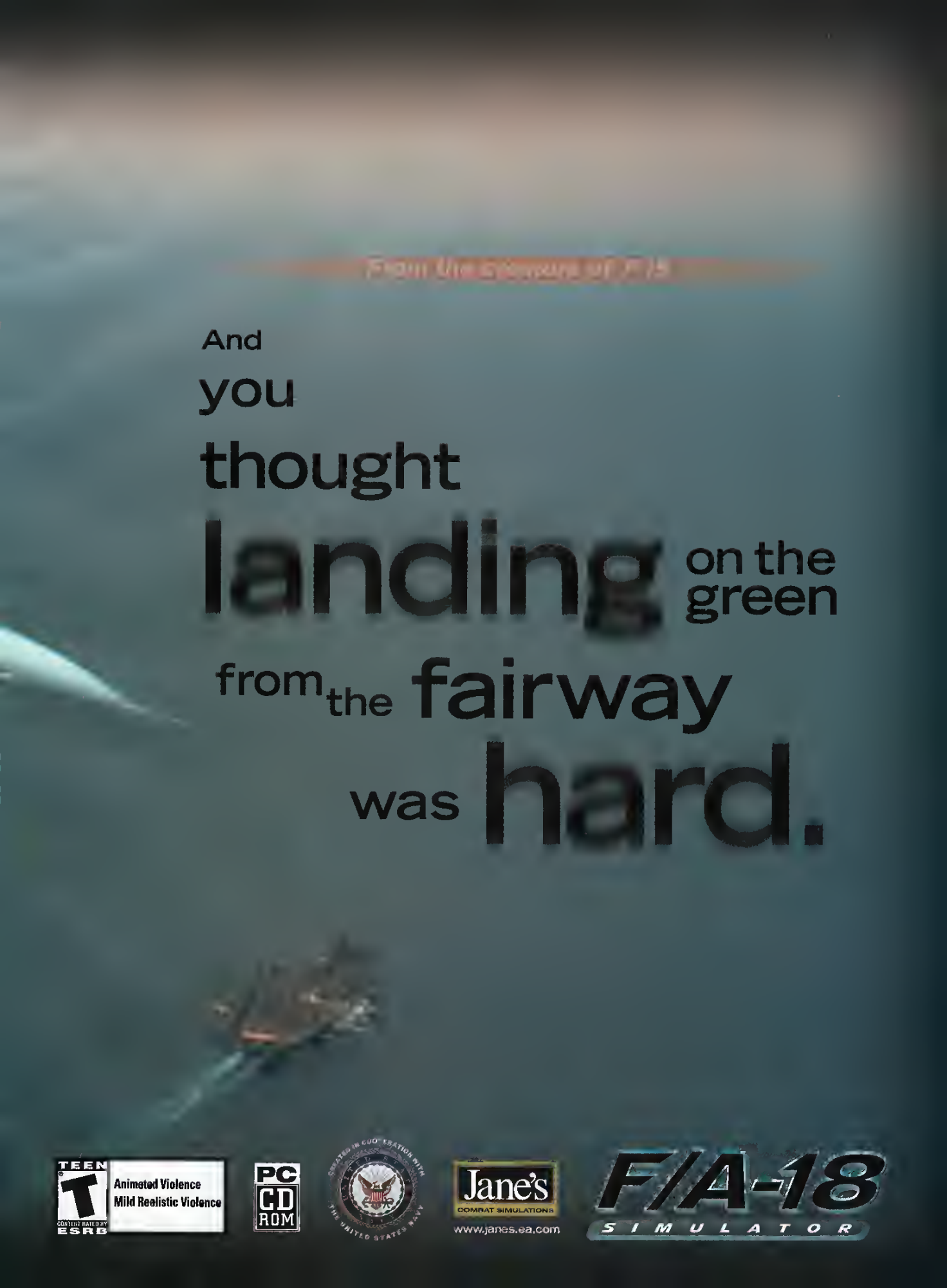


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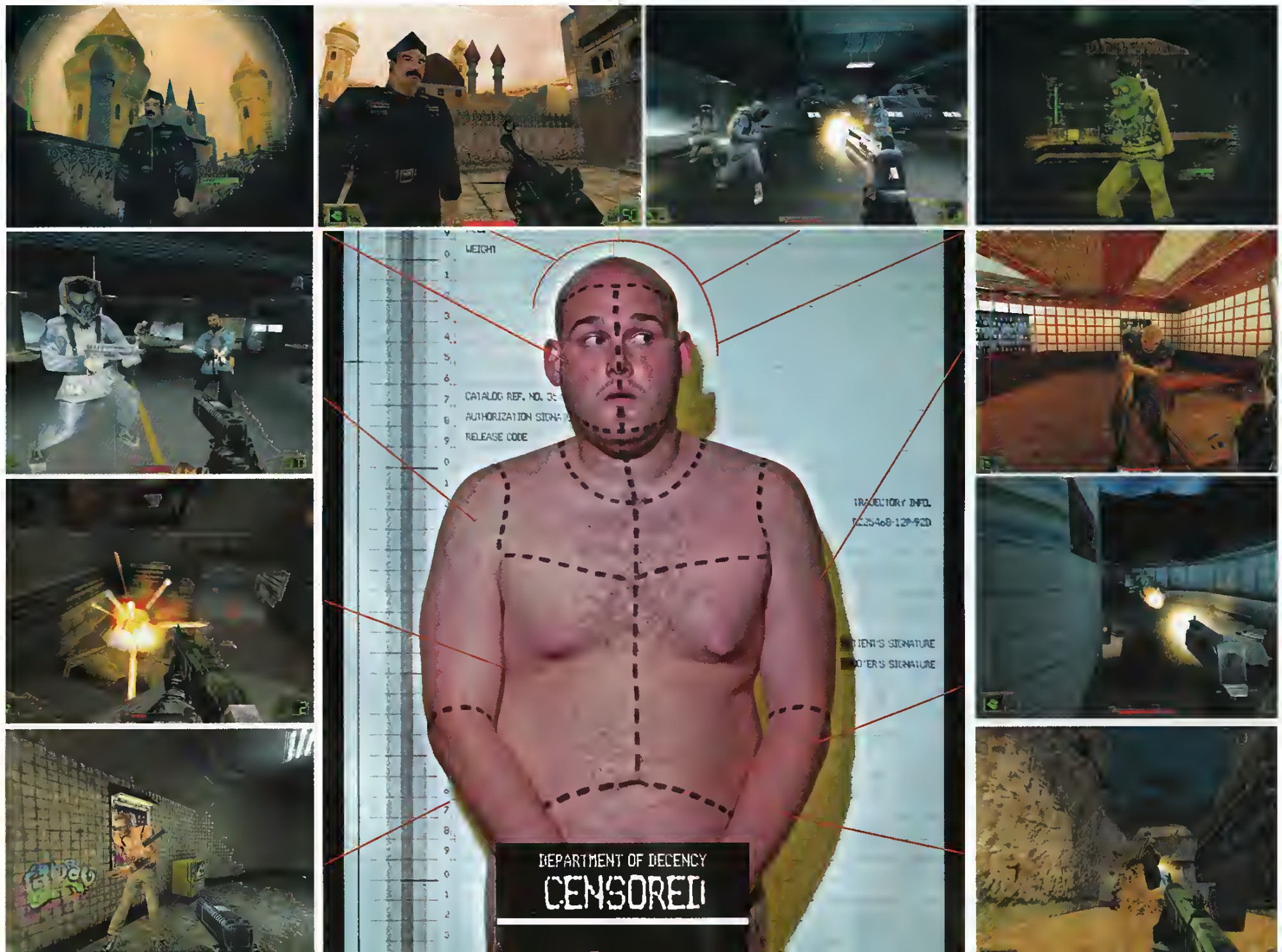
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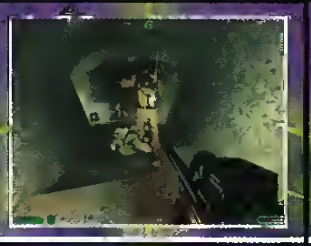
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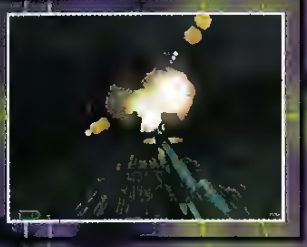
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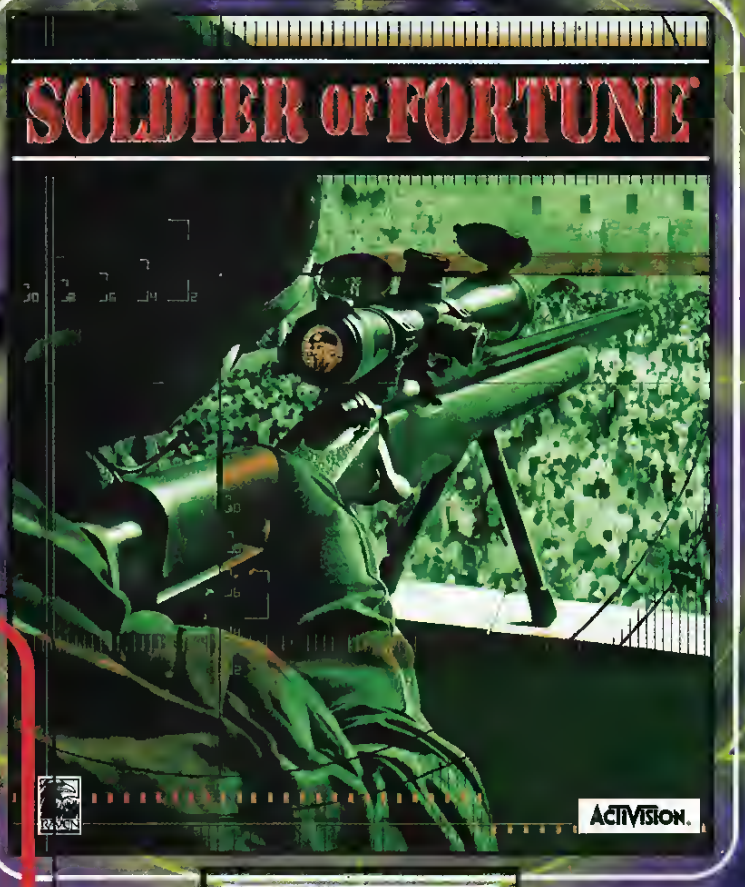
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The Dark Side of Jeremy

Ever since he first joined the staff as our webmaster, and continuing through his current role as our disc editor, young Jeremy Williams has been making a name for himself as the quiet, sweet, cherub-faced kid in the back corner of the newsroom. His winning smile, easy-going attitude, and baby face instantly endear people to him. Always willing to make the lunch run, never complaining about a thing, Jeremy has earned himself a reputation as the perfect co-worker.

But could it be possible that there is *another* Jeremy, lurking behind that convivial exterior?

Evidence has come to light that casts a long, dark shadow over the sunny personality we've come to associate with Jeremy. It began the week he arrived, when our beloved office hamster, Hammy, met a terrible demise. Coincidence? Perhaps. But Jeremy soon eased *himself* into the unofficial role of office mascot, becoming our primary source of cheer whenever we were stressed out. Hmm, how convenient!

We didn't notice this at the time, of course. Nor did we really notice just how dependent we had become on Jeremy's good graces to supply the majority of our lunch runs. Before long, it became clear to us that we were, in fact, his slaves...we basically have to do whatever he says for fear of having to once again make lunch runs for ourselves. And this has armed him with a terrible, terrible power.

But the most chilling of our realizations have been the occasional glimpses we've had into his private psyche. Sometimes, in harmless conversation, Jeremy will let slip a nugget of verbal evil...for example, when we were all discussing the contents of our closets, he joked, "I have a bunch of bones in there." He said it with a sort of cryptic half-smile, like it was maybe a joke. There was a palpable shudder running through us as he turned and quietly left the room after his comment.

The truth is becoming plainer with each of his cheerful grins, "heartfelt" greetings, and lunch runs. There is something unspeakably sinister brewing in Jeremy's head. When it finally reveals itself in apocalyptic fury, we may regret not only the day we hired him, but also the very day we were born.



They always said that the devil will come in the form of a popular guy!

Hardware Requirements

With each *PC Gamer* review, you'll find two very important pieces of information: the game's minimum hardware requirements and the hardware configurations we recommend as the *least* you'll need to really enjoy the game. While a game will run on the minimum system the manufacturer specifies, it might not run all that well. Because of this, we test each game on several systems so we can bring you a more realistic assessment of what you'll *really* need.

THE PC GAMER RATINGS SYSTEM

100%–90% CLASSIC

Not many games can earn a rating higher than 90%, and even fewer can approach the magic 100. Anything that we rate higher than 90% is an instant classic — a game that's truly significant in both content and design, and one that we'd recommend without reservation to anyone interested in PC gaming.

89%–80% EXCELLENT

These are excellent games. Anything that scores in this range is well worth your attention, though it may not make any significant advances over its rivals. Also, some genuine benchmark games of decidedly specialist taste will fall into this area — it may be the best 7th Cavalry simulation on the market, but not all of us want to relive Little Bighorn.

79%–70% VERY GOOD

These are pretty good games, which we would recommend to fans of the particular genre — although it's a safe bet that there are probably better games out there.

69%–60% GOOD

A reasonable, above-average game. It may be worth buying, but probably has a few significant flaws that keep it from earning a higher rating.

59%–50% FAIR

Very ordinary games. Not completely worthless, but not a very good way to spend your gaming dollar, either.

49%–40% BELOW AVERAGE

Poor quality. Only a few, slightly redeeming features keep them from falling into the abyss of the next category....

39%–0% DON'T BOTHER

Just terrible games — and the lower you go, the worse they get. Avoid these titles like the plague — and don't say we didn't warn you!

GAME OF THE MONTH

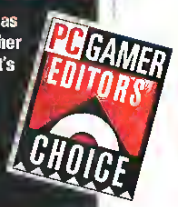
Each issue, we give out the prestigious *PC Gamer* Game of the Month award to the one new title that stands out, head and shoulders, above the rest of the month's releases. Aaaand this month, our winner is...





EDITORS' CHOICE

Every month, we honor the best games we see — those earning 88% or higher — with our Editors' Choice award. It's not easy to earn, and there are a lot of excellent games that fall just short of the honor. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on a game at a local software shop, you can bet it's among the best.







Planescape: Torment



CATEGORY: Roleplaying DEVELOPER: Black Isle Studios PUBLISHER: Interplay Productions, (800) INTERPLAY, *www.interplay.com* REQUIRED: Pentium 200MMX, 32MB RAM, 650MB hard-drive space, 8X CD-ROM, DirectX-supported video card with 4MB RAM WE RECOMMEND: Pentium II 333, 64MB RAM MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: None

Black Isle Studios delivers an enthralling adventure through some of the most wondrous RPG realms ever encountered.

It's difficult not to make the obvious jokes about waking up in the middle of a mortuary with a splitting headache and no memory of who or what you are. Granted, anyone who's ingested a bit too much of the sauce can identify with the feeling, but in this case, the occasion that results in the said circumstance isn't a long night of booze, but death. You see, that's what happens when you're an immortal.

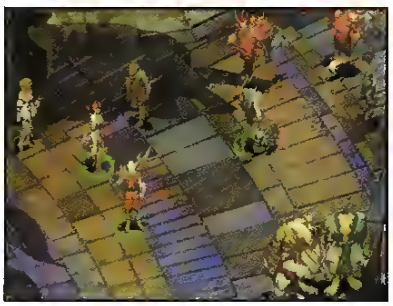
That's the opening of Interplay's *Planescape: Torment* — players take on the role of the Nameless One, a creature who wakes up one day with no memory or even any idea of who or what he is. After a floating, talking skull initiates a conversation, the Nameless One discovers a cryptic message carved into his back — apparently it's a note to himself. And with that, players have to make their way out of the macabre mortuary and into the labyrinths of Sigil, a city of darkness, magic, and portals that lead everywhere and nowhere.

Torment is based on TSR's Planescape AD&D universe, which means that instead of elves, dragons, and furry-footed munchkins, players will encounter undead zombies, liches, and other things that go bump in the night. Sigil, the city where most of the action is located, is the central hub of the universe, where portals open to all other dimensions. The city is ruled over by the Lady of Pain, a mysterious, powerful figure. This rather bizarre location, along with an immortal main character who's lived and died so many times that he's become an expert at anything and everything, lets the developers do things we've never seen before in an RPG — and they do it incredibly well.



Spell effects are dark, huge, and vividly powerful. Even experienced RPGers will be impressed.

The game engine is a modified version of Bioware's *Baldur's Gate* tech. Although similar, *Torment* does things *Baldur's Gate* fans have been crying out for. Automaps now have auto-notation, as well as custom notes. The journal breaks up quests into completed and assigned categories. On-screen characters are larger, and the backgrounds far more animated. Even the spell effects have been redone to make them bigger, better, and much more impressive. However, not all the problems with the engine have been resolved — pathfinding is still sticky, characters block other characters, and inventory management is still a little sub-game in itself.



The streets are filled with a variety of NPCs going about their daily lives.

The lovingly detailed backgrounds lend an eerie darkness to the game. Huge gears move ponderously. NPCs wander through a squalid city filled with garbage. Zombies shuffle along hallways littered with severed body parts. And the richer areas of town are covered in mosaics, statues, and brilliant lights. Wherever you go, whether it's the orderly Harmonium or undead-infested Dead Nations, the artwork conveys the feeling of the area perfectly.

What really draws you in, however, is the incredibly deep and involving storyline. From the very beginning, the mystery surrounding the Nameless One is a gem. The story is mostly contained in dialogue, however, so players should expect to do a lot of reading,

Choose Wisely, Young Apprentice

The originality of building the Nemeless One's career in-geme might throw some players off et first, but it's reelly pretty eesy. The difficult pert is assigning charecter points when the geme first sterts. Players should heve e besic idee of what they want to do when they begin the geme, end assign points to Strength, Intelligence, Wisdom, Dexterity, Constitution, end Cherisme accordingly. Then, in the game itself, running ecross e fighter, thief, mege, or other speciel cless of cheracter will let players [illegible] variety of skills — although only one profession is available at a time. For example, players who build up the Nameless One's axe proficiency will be a bit disappointed when they become a mage, and can no longer wield axes. That's the AD&D system for ya.



The inventory system still requires some micromanagement, but quick-use slots allow fast access to a variety of items and weapons.

especially in the first few hours, when the entire Hive neighborhood lies open and just about every NPC with a name has some quest for you.

While most of the quests are fetch-and-carry jobs, they have some of the most interesting storylines. The Nameless One might be pursuing objects that have severe impact on the world, or perhaps just uncovering a spy's secret plot. Most quests, however, will give the player more information about the Nameless One himself, or open up new careers for the scarred main character.

When players start the game, they can distribute character points to various aspects of the Nameless One, but that's the last bit of out-of-game modification they can do. The rest of the Nameless One's career is determined in-game, through asking professional specialists to train him, or seeking instruction with a master. When the game starts, the Nameless One is a basic fighter, but he can become a thief or a mage by simply asking the right people the right questions (and usually solving a few puzzles). Also, alignment is determined through game actions and dialogue choices — players can choose to be a nice guy most of the time, or a total asshole to everyone they meet, and the alignment will change accordingly. What's even better, though, is that no matter what alignment players choose, there's a way to get through the game. It might be more difficult to get through the game if everyone hates the Nameless One, but all the puzzles have multiple solutions to account for any style of play.

Just as in *Baldur's Gate*, players can pause the game at any time, assign tasks to their party, and unpause. However, the modifications Black Isle Studios made to the original engine keep players in the game at all times — instead of watching player interaction or combat statistics scroll by in a tiny text window at the bottom of the screen, messages float up from the characters in the game window. Longer dialogue, however, pops up on a window that is normally hidden during play. Right-clicking the mouse brings up a mini-menu, where players can instantly access spells, skills, items, weapons, as well as game options, inventory, the automap, and the journal. This ease of access means less time messing with windows and buttons in the interface, and more concentration on what's going on in the game.

With so many different ways to get through the game, it's likely that many players will go back through just to see the alternate solutions and discover some of the secrets they may have missed.



The automap will automatically add notations to certain places, although players can add their own at any time.

While the game forgoes the multiplayer aspects of *Baldur's Gate*, this is no great loss. With so many different ways to get through the game, it's likely that many players will go back through just to see the alternate solutions and discover some of the secrets they may have missed. When it comes right down to it, this game is a masterpiece of role-playing — the dialogue is some of the most well-written of any RPG, the environments are varied and downright enthralling, the spell effects are mind-blowing, and the story contains some of the most inventive, unique characters players will ever have in a party. Whether or not you're a hard-core fan of RPGs, *Torment* is a must-have.

—Michael Wolf



In the *Planescape* universe, it's quite natural to fight wererats among the decaying bodies of the interred dead. The atmosphere in the game is appropriately spooky.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: Fantastic, well-written story; immersive graphics; refined interface; unique characters.

93%

LOWS: The inventory system requires some micromanagement; pathfinding is a slight problem.

BOTTOM LINE: *Torment* is one of the most inventive, entertaining RPGs ever created.

Quake III Arena

CATEGORY: First-person shooter **DEVELOPER:** id Software **PUBLISHER:** Activision, (310) 255-2000, *www.activision.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 233MHz with 8MB video card, Pentium 266MHz with 4MB video card, or AMD 350MHz with 4MB video card, 64MB RAM, 25MB hard-drive space, 4X CD-ROM, 3D accelerator card with full OpenGL support, DirectX-compatible sound card, 28.8kbps Internet connection **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II or Celeron 400MHz processor or higher, 570MB hard drive space, 3D accelerator card with 32-bit color capability and 32MB memory, 128MB RAM, 56.6kbps or faster Internet connection **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play, Maximum players: 64

It's the best deathmatch game on the planet. But what if you're looking for a little bit more from your next first-person shooter?

While 1999 will be remembered as the year that the world escaped a potential technological collapse, it was also the year that saw the very real fall of some major dynasties. The Chicago Bulls — winner of six NBA titles in the 1990s and clearly the hoops team of the decade — were staring at a 3-26 record just a week into the year 2000. The Dallas Cowboys, who took home three Super Bowl trophies over the course of the decade, limped into (and right out of) the playoffs with a .500 record. Oh, how the mighty had fallen.

Computer gaming has its dynasties, too, and one of the biggest of the 1990s was id Software. For almost the entire decade, id lorded over the realm of first-person shooters with an iron gauntlet: *Wolfenstein 3D* ushered in smoothly scrolling FPS action, *Doom* and *Doom II* took it to the next level with vastly improved graphics and gripping deathmatch combat, and *Quake* and *Quake II* almost single-handedly revolutionized



Quad Damage doesn't just make mincemeat out of enemies — it makes your weapon shimmer in a very groovy way!

multiplayer gaming over the Internet. And that's not all: an entire industry sprang up around id games, from gaming services to web sites to third-party software vendors.

Now the hotly anticipated *Quake III Arena* has finally arrived — and with it the end of the id dynasty might be in sight. Don't get the wrong idea: *QIII* takes the frantic, gory action millions crave and cranks it up several notches in terms of graphics and level design. On the right system, your jaw will drop at how fantastic things look and how fast and smoothly the action flows. But when all is said and done, *QIII* offers little more than *Quake* or *Quake II* did when it comes down to the nuts-and-bolts of gameplay — actually less, since its single-player game is little more than a practice mode for online competition. Compared to the rich depth of *Tribes*, the innovative multiplayer modes in *Unreal Tournament*, and the phenomenal single-player drama of *Half-Life*, *QIII* feels — I can't believe I'm saying



You lookin' at *me*? 'Cause there's no one else here. Oh, wait, there is.

this — a bit like a throwback.

Hot multiplayer action is undoubtedly what has given *Quake* and *Quake II* their incredible longevity, and apparently Carmack and company felt that so few people bothered with those games' single-player modes that they totally revamped that aspect of the game for *QIII*. Gone are the days of advancing through level after level, blasting your way into rooms crammed full of monsters and zombified soldiers whose only purpose was to halt your progress; in *QIII* your single-player opponents are Bots who have the same goal as you: kill everything in sight (or everything that's wearing a different color suit than they are, in the case of Team Deathmatch and Capture the Flag games).

GALLERY OF GORE

Let's face it: just about everyone was starting to get a little sick and tired of that steroid-filled marine that's been the stock multiplayer character ever since *Quake* first appeared. Sure, you could always download custom skins, but wouldn't it be nice if we got a little more choices about our character's appearance after shelling out 50 bucks?

Well, this is one area where id didn't let us down. There's a jaw-dropping variety of characters to choose from in *Quake III Arena*, all exquisitely rendered and featuring their own distinct cries of pain and anguish. Choosing favorites is hard, especially with so many exotic selections, but here are some of the ones I really dig:



www.DailyRadar.com



The machina gan obvioasly isn't tha waapon of choica, bat if yoa get in close and open ap a steady stream of fire you'll be rewarded with buckets of blood.

This change means there really isn't a need for a storyline, but one was cooked up (or half-baked) anyway. You play as a gladiator in the futuristic Arena Eternal. You can fight your way though each of the game's maps in Tourney mode, facing one opponent (occasionally two) on each level until you face Xaero, Lord of the Final Arena (read: the Boss to end all Bosses). More engaging is the game's Skirmish mode, which lets you play against Bots in both Tourney mode and the other three game types: Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, and Capture the Flag. The advantage to Skirmish mode is that not only can you battle against a bunch o' Bots, but you also get to check out all the levels you'll be seeing online without having to follow the linear path of the Tourney game.

So how do the Bots stack up? Very nicely, thank you. I wouldn't go so far as some have and roundly proclaim that it feels like you're fighting against human opponents, but then again I don't really care so long as they don't do anything blatantly stupid — and in Deathmatch games they rarely do (unless you play on the "I Can Win!" setting, where the Bots basically stand around and wait for you to deliver the death blow). Five difficulty levels let you tailor the competition almost precisely to your skill level, making for an excellent practice mode. Play on, say, the third highest difficulty setting for a while, and you'll gradually see your skills improve enough that you can confidently move on to the next setting. There's one exception to this — the Nightmare setting, where the Bots not only respond to situations in the blink of an eye but can nail moving targets with the railgun at insane distances.

Quake III *feels — I can't believe I'm saying this — a bit like a throwback.*



To sarvive very long on this map, you'll have to hona your jamping and landing skills to perfection.

Yup, these Bots are pretty smart — but they can also be insolent at times during Team games. Over and over again during Capture the Flag matches, I would launch the game and immediately issue the "I am the Leader" command (more on commands later), only to see one of my Bot team members reply with, "I am the Leader." This happened constantly until I realized I had to back up my talk with actions: if you immediately issue a command after claiming that Leader role, the Bots will obey you Ultimately, the single-player game is only a nice way to hone your fragging skills and memorize the command tree without looking like a fool online, and on that level it's a complete success.

Anyone familiar with the first two Quake games knows that user-created skins are wildly popular, and for good reason: everyone got tired of seeing rooms full of the same bulked-up Space Marine running around, and finally some users did something about it. *QIII* addresses the issue by giving you a veritable rogue's gallery of models to choose from when picking your player character. Male and female, alien and human, undead and living — there's a little bit of

Around the Office

What the rest of PC Gamer's *Quake III Arena* veterans think...



"I've been a dyed-in-the-wool *Quake* addict for years, but even I have to admit that in a head-on confrontation *Unreal Tournament* blows *Quake III* away with superior gameplay variation, weapons, presentation, and, yes, even graphics. I'm sorely disappointed by the lack of creativity in *QIII*; I expected so much more than just a graphical overhaul and a sloppy attempt at 'user-friendly' presentation. *QIII* still packs a mighty deathmatch punch, but that's no longer enough to satisfy this first-person gamer."



"While both games are excellent in their own right, I still find myself loading up *Quake III Arena* a lot more often than *Unreal Tournament*. I'm not a big fan of team play, preferring the all-out carnage of the straight deathmatch. And for my money, no game does it better than *Quake III*."



"I tried again and again to get into *QIII*, but it just dropped the ball. The weapons are completely unbalanced; everything respawns too quickly, so everyone has the same armor, weapons, etc., thus making upgrades useless; and every level looks the same (Note to id: Brown is *not* the only color you can use). *QIII* does have cool curved surfaces, but those hardly make it a good game."



"Maybe I'm just a deathmatch purist, but I'm enjoying *QIII* more than *UT*. *Unreal Tournament* is fun, but there's just something about how the models move and how the weapons feel that doesn't appeal to me in the same way as id's latest and greatest."



"Despite *UT*'s many maps, real world architecture, modes of play, superior AI, and excellent interface, I would rather play *Quake III* any day. The weapons are better balanced, and there is an ineffable quality about the player movement that I find a thousand times more immersing."

something for everyone here, and what's more impressive is just how finely rendered these models are. Not only can you see the weapon a foe is wielding, but also fine facial details. But while the visual variety is excellent, don't expect to gain a huge advantage by picking a rail-thin character like the skeletal warrior Bones or the squat extraterrestrial Orbb — in many hours of play I've never seen enemies outdistance me unless they'd picked up the Haste power-up, and the bounding boxes that determine shot damage are the same for one and all.

Even so, the inclusion of so many cool characters is a greatly appreciated piece of eye candy — and it's indicative of how much importance id placed on making *QIII* a visual masterpiece. Things look awfully good on 16-bit video cards like Voodoo IIs running in SLI mode, and the imagery is unbelievable with a good 32-bit video card like a TNT2 Ultra or GeForce.

Unfortunately, more of the same is precisely what Quake III dishes up with its multiplayer modes.

Another reason the environments feel so alive and immediate is because there are so many ways in which you can interact with them. Bounce pads send you soaring skyward; acceleration pads shoot you forward with a burst of super speed; platforms move up and down to provide access to new areas; heavy fog enshrouds arenas, forcing you to keep your eyes peeled for movement — all these give you that "being there" sensation so vital to the success of any first-person shooter. Provided you've got time to admire the scenery, you'll also love the fact that each weapon leaves distinct marks.

The levels have been wickedly crafted, with all the shortcuts, camping spots and "killing fields" that make Deathmatch fun; many are loaded down with the much-ballyhooed "curved spaces" made possible by the *Quake III* engine, and while in my naivete I'm still pondering just how this makes things drastically better in terms of gameplay, I've got to admit that it does lend an air of realism that's a notch above anything created by the *Quake II* engine.

One area that id didn't muck about with too much was the weapons department: the pistol has been replaced with a Gauntlet (if you're close enough to use this gloved weapon, you're probably *too* close!) but old favorites like the shotgun, plasma gun, machine gun, railgun, grenade launcher, and rocket launcher are all intact. That's fine and dandy, but there are gonna be some definite moans and groans from countless Quake-heads when they see what's been done to the mighty BFG: it's basically a pumped-up plasma gun with a different colored projectile. It's no biggie to me — it's still fairly potent — but could be a letdown for those expecting more of the same.

Unfortunately, more of the same is precisely what *QIII* dishes up with its multiplayer modes. It's been more than two years since *Quake II*, and what do we get for our patience? Let's see, there's Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch, Capture the Flag, and a Tourney mode, where you queue up and watch two gladiators go at it until you finally get a crack at whoever is the reigning champion. I



There are plenty of nice camping spots in *QIII*, but it doesn't take long for your enemies to find out where they are.



A body flies through the air as a load of buckshot hits home. Nice touch!

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HOW THE BEST STACK UP

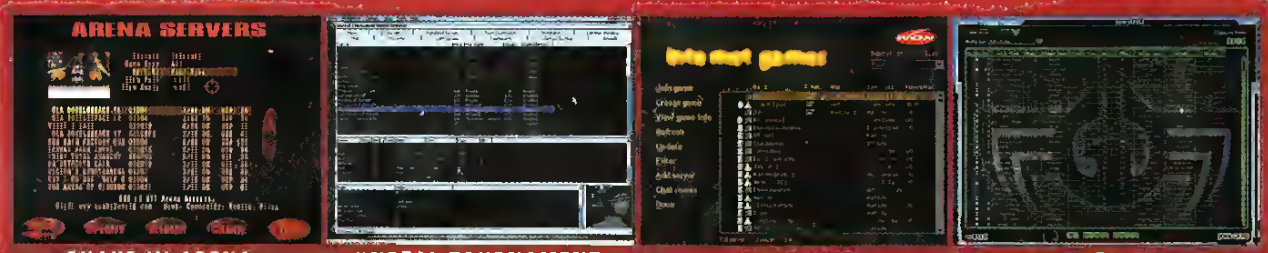
QUAKE III ARENA
UNREAL TOURNAMENT
HALF-LIFE
TRIBES

It's a given that good coding that takes into account the vagaries of the Internet and great level designs are critical parts of any great first-person shooter. But for gamers who spend a lot of time online — I mean *true* FPS addicts — there are a lot of other components to the ultimate network fragfest: how many games types are offered, how easily you can glean information about a specific game before joining, and how smoothly you can transition from one game to another. As you can see from the chart below, *Quake III Arena* doesn't begin to match the features offered by some of the other hot multiplayer first-person shooters action gamers love.

GAME	SINGLE-PLAYER MODE?	MULTIPLAYER GAME TYPES*	SERVER FILTERS?	RE-PING SINGLE SERVER?	SCORES & PINGS BEFORE JOINING?	JOIN DIFFERENT GAME W/O PINGING ALL SERVERS?
Quake III Arena	Yes	4	Yes (limited)	No	No	No
Unreal Tournament	Yes	6	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Half-Life	Yes	3	Yes	Yes	Yes**	Yes
Tribes	No	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

** Does not include user mods* *** Does not show players' ping times*

A quick glance at the matchmaking interfaces below shows that here again *Quake III Arena* simply hasn't kept up with the times.

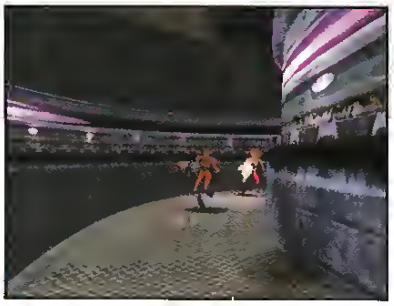


QUAKE III ARENA | UNREAL TOURNAMENT | HALF-LIFE | TRIBES

don't care how much you love the Quake franchise: these are some pretty thin pickings for the year 2000, especially compared to *QIII*'s direct competitor *Unreal Tournament*'s imaginative modes like Assault and Domination, not to mention the richly complex yet highly rewarding team-based play of *Tribes*. Toss in the fact that only four maps are available for CTF play in the retail version, and you get the uneasy feeling that id was so exhausted making things look great and play faster than hell (yes, this might be the fastest Deathmatch action in the world to this point) that no energy or imagination was left to implement some fresh gameplay modes.

Even more disturbing than the lack of multiplayer modes, though, is the game's matchmaking interface for 'net play. Simply put, it's one of the most clumsy, inefficient, and frustrating designs I've had to work with in several years of online play. Want to create a filter so that pinging the master server will only return the results you want in terms of ping time or a specific map? Tough. After hours of scouring the manual and documentation I could find no such feature. I'll bet you'd like to know whether a game is password-protected before you join, wouldn't you? Too bad, because all that's displayed after checking the master server is server name, map, number of players, and the ping time.

Hey, I think it'd be neat — no, I think it should be *mandatory* — to be able to refresh a single server from the server list, but apparently that's not an option here, unless there's some console command I'm unaware of to handle that chore. (On a side note, I'm still wondering why the only console commands listed in the documentation involve Bots — if you want all the other useful stuff, you'll have to check a *Quake III* site. And I love the way these guys let users take care of documentation for them; I couldn't even find a list of console commands at the "official" Quake3World Web site that's put into your Startup menu when you install the game!) Can you check player scores, stats, and pings before connecting to a game? No. After enjoying these features in *Tribes* and *Unreal Tournament*, I simply assumed that any top multiplayer title would include this stuff as a matter of course — but you know what they say happens when you ASSuMe, right?



The curved surfaces id promised abound in *QIII*, adding a sense of realism as well as some very groovy environments.

Once you get past these oversights, you'll be in for some fragging of the first order, with blood spraying and heads rolling as screams fill the air (each character has a unique cry of pain — very cool). But even here are annoyances that somehow made their way into the final product. Only the top scorers are displayed on the Results menu, so there's not a simple way to see whether teams are unbalanced (maybe there's a console command — oh, forget it). Even the larger maps have some pretty cramped areas, and with Team Damage on, it's pretty easy to frag a friend — but the dialogue at the top of the screen only shows who killed you, not if the person was on your team. If they're near the bottom of the score list, it could take a while to figure not only if they are on your team, but also whether the frag was intentional or out-and-out team killing.

I've got to admit that I've been playing *QIII* like a madman in spite of all these differences, and in a few months there are sure to be a score of user mods that'll broaden the narrow horizons of the game's multiplayer modes. As it stands now, though, *Quake III Arena* only breaks new ground in terms of technology — and that's just not enough to keep it at the head of the pack when other developers have shown us just how much more can be done with online play.

—Stephen Poole

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: Incredible graphics; great level designs; lightning-fast gameplay.

LOWS: Limited multiplayer game types; painfully inefficient matchmaking interface; tossed-off manual.

BOTTOM LINE: *QIII* is definitely a blast to play, but there's not much new gameplay.



****CONFIDENTIAL****

III. BREAKING THE OATH:
TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~

1. A verbal warning accompanied by a review of security oath.
2. A stronger warning, sometimes accompaniad by browbeating ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ and intimidation.
3. Psyohologically working on an individual to bring on depression that will lead to suicide.
4. Elimination of tha individual that has baan made to appear as an accident, suicide or heart attack

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- Send any and all information to www.unatco.com. It could be the difference between life and death.

- Establish a new base of operations with [redacted] and forge alliances.

- Find a way to build your own capabilities to the point where you have a chance of defeating the one with God-like powers.



01937219013-1
1525 6862

Item No. 14428 562

CONSEQUENCES:

Diagram B2 Situational Missions (Fig's 2.1-2.6)

Fig. 2.1 build your own capabilities



Fig. 2.2 establish base of operations

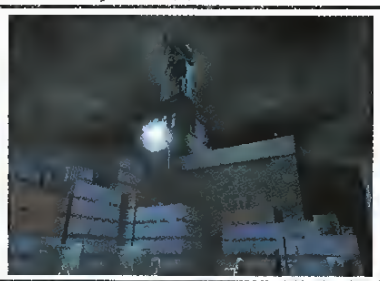


Fig. 2.3 maintain control over Ambrosia

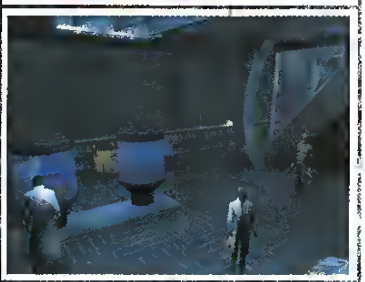


Fig. 2.4 Survive incarceration

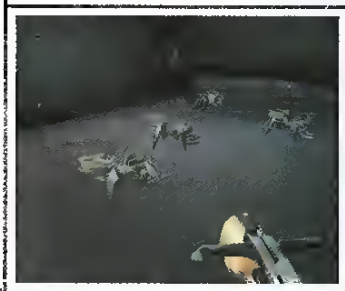
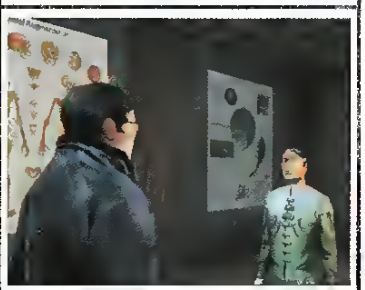


Fig. 2.5 establish ties to ally base



Fig. 2.6 Expand your pool of allies



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Gabriel Knight 3

CATEGORY: Adventure **DEVELOPER:** Sierra Studios **PUBLISHER:** Sierra, (800) 757-7707, *www.sierra.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166 with 3D card (Pentium 233 without), 250MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 35MB hard-drive space, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 4MB 3D accelerator card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

It's a long, deep adventure in the most classic sense, and that alone is welcome enough to make you overlook the game's flaws.

Gabriel Knight 3 arrived at the tail end of our annual awards cycle, in which no winner was named in the "Adventure" category because almost no adventures were published. It's tempting to make a Serious Point about the decline of adventure games, but the simple fact is that gamers are choosing other, faster-paced forms of entertainment. The last noteworthy graphical adventure, *Grim Fandango*, died on the shelves despite being an incredibly fun, witty, stylish game. There's no point lamenting the death of the adventure game: you gamers killed it.

Now along comes *Gabriel Knight 3*, a classic-style adventure with 50-plus hours of gameplay, rich locations, a deep story, plenty of objects to pick up and use, and lots of situational and environmental puzzles. It has everything that we loved in adventure games going all the way back to the text parser, and it's even in 3D. It also requires you to radically re-adjust your gaming expectations to a more leisurely pace. In the 3D action age of drive-by gaming, a title that requires you to find a piece of tape in the back of a closet requires a bit more attention to detail, a sharper mind, and a willingness to take your time and sort things out rationally.



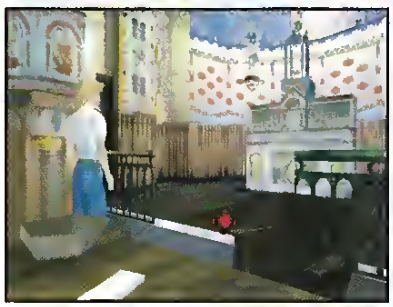
Your conversations with the chateau's various parsonages will unravel a spectacularly twisted plot that's worthy of any adventure.

Gabriel Knight 3 does all this pretty well while offering a story full of fascinating turns. Gabriel — a Schattenjäger, or monster hunter — is in the French town of Rennes-le-Chateau, a nexus for alternative religious historians. A treasure hunt has drawn various oddballs and misfits to the town, and the kidnapping of a young girl soon makes them all suspects in an even greater mystery involving the Merovingian dynasty (see sidebar), vampires, Templars, Masons, and the rest of the grab bag of Fortean freakishness.

The story is told in chapters over three days, with days divided into five, six, and eight time periods. You advance to the next time segment when you've spoken to the right people and solved the right puzzles. In some of these segments, you assume the role of Grace Nakimura, Gabriel's assistant. Interactions are based around an effective pop-up icon bar. Conversations are initiated by clicking on a character, and then on a picture icon keyed to a particular subject; object puzzles use the same interface. Inventory items are easily swapped in and out of Gabriel's active hand and are used to solve these puzzles. As you get further in the game, you'll gain access to other tools, including a fingerprinting kit and SIDNEY, the Schattenjäger Information Database. SIDNEY is a helpful computer that not only lets you look up information, but also enter key data on suspects for analysis. It all combines to create a very fulfilling and challenging puzzle-based adventure that manages to stay fresh and interesting. The only elements that feel out of place are a few time-based



A great deal of effort apparently went into accurately recreating the locations in the book, particularly Rennes le Chateau. There are some truly gorgeous scenes in the game.



Everything seems a bit too bright and happy-looking to sustain any real suspense.

www.DailyRadar.com



A lot of the game's characters are saddled with disappointingly caricatured voices and accents, the worst offender being Gabriel himself as voiced by Tim Curry.

and jumping puzzles, which mar an otherwise pure adventure experience with inappropriate action sequences.

Though the adventure elements and storyline are entertaining, they are seriously compromised by two critical failures. The most glaring hits you the moment Gabriel opens his mouth, and its name is Tim Curry. Without a doubt this is the single most grating voice performance since the early days of CD-ROM conversions. Curry, an Englishman, has adopted a slow, whiskey-slurred southern patois that demands a slug in the jaw every time he opens his yap. We've cut this guy enough slack since *Rocky Horror* (a crummy movie anyway) and it's time he be condemned to *Home Alone* sequels for the rest of his career. No matter how momentous the event, Gabriel can be counted on to react with world-weary sarcasm. Other characters also adopt ridiculous, high-school-play-quality accents and wind up sounding like Pepe Le Pew, Boss Hog, Fat Bastard or some other broad characterization dependent upon nationality.

Characters also adopt ridiculous, high-school-play-quality accents and wind up sounding like Pepe Le Pew, Boss Hog, Fat Bastard, or some other broad characterization dependent upon nationality.

The approach to numerous characters throughout the game seems to be straight out of a correspondence course called Character Creation Through Stereotyping. Everyone is a caricature, and though they move the plot along, they never convince as effective characters in a good story should. Making this far worse is Jane Jensen's utter inability to script convincing, clever, or sharp dialogue — it's an abundance of cliches, with a tendency to pass snide cynicism and sarcasm off as actual wit. This is too bad, since the plotting and narrative structure are strong.



Get ready to plumb the depths of a religious land mine in the shadows of the chateau.

GK3 uses a decent 3D engine for characters and environment. This enables the creation of some good models and attractive locations. The geography and layouts have apparently been thoroughly researched, and there is indeed a veracity to the look and feel of various places. Characters have decent animations and pretty good lip-syncing. Rooms are rarely so cluttered you can't zero in on important elements if you have a good eye. The camera can also be moved around the room independent of a character, so you may look around at things and *then* have Gabriel or Grace perform an action.

The problem with the graphical element is not the level of detail, but the overall dull look. After so many games with atmospheric lighting and positional sound, the environments of *GK3* sometimes wind up feeling like sets. Flat, even lighting is the culprit. There are few of the evocative shadows that a horror adventure needs to sustain a mood. The result is acceptable, but Sierra would have done better to spend its money licensing *Unreal*.

Gabriel Knight 3 is a decidedly mixed experience. On the one hand, you have a deep, interesting, and compelling story to ground some very clever and satisfying puzzles. The interface is unobtrusive and the environments interesting. On the other hand, you are forced to spend hours at a time with a lead character of almost unbearable obnoxiousness and possessed of a voice that makes an eloquent elocutor of Roscoe P. Coltrane. But if you're a fan of what many people have written off as the moribund adventure genre, *GK3* will definitely give you a nice fix for your habit.

—*T. Liam McDonald*

The Merovingian Dynasty

Gabriel Knight 3 is based on a cluster of classic Fortean enigmas tied to the Merovingian Dynasty and the small French village of Rennes le Chateau, its church, and its mysterious pastor Father Sauniere. The dominant theory — popularized by alternative historians (or crackpots, depending upon your viewpoint) Baigent and Leigh in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* — is that Jesus survived the crucifixion, was protected by Joseph of Arimathea, married, and had children. These children became part of the Frankish nobility, and the Templars, Masons, Priory of Zion, and other secret sects have spent 2,000 years protecting the bloodline and the secret. In the process, the Templars deposited the alchemical secret of transmuting base elements into gold in the chapel at Rennes.

While the theory may sound far-fetched, it sprang from indisputable historical fact. The chapel at Rennes did have links to both the Templars and the Masons. The Templars did loot a large amount of treasure from the Holy Land. They also performed secret excavations beneath Jerusalem (among the last to do so in the Temple Mount) and, some believe, found key biblical artifacts. Father Sauniere did indeed excavate in the chapel, and then mysteriously came into a great deal of wealth. (Most likely he came upon a cache of treasure looted from the Holy Land.) Anything beyond this is wild speculation.

Horror novelist Chet Williamson (father of our own *Killing Box* golden boy Colin Williamson) recently published an excellent trilogy of novels on this very subject. Collectively dubbed "The Searchers," the three novels are *City of Iron*, *Empire of Dust*, and *Siege of Stone*.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

80%

HIGHS: Classic-style object puzzles; interesting story; gorgeous scenery.

LOWS: Awful dialogue scripting and voice acting; stereotyping.

BOTTOM LINE: The gameplay is quite excellent, but Tim Curry is so off-putting that it almost makes this one a tough call.

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Interstate '82

CATEGORY: Action DEVELOPER: Activision PUBLISHER: Activision, (310) 255-2000, *www.activision.com* REQUIRED: Pentium 233; 32MB RAM, 400MB hard-drive space, 4X CD-ROM drive, 16-bit video card with 4MB memory, DirectX 7-compatible sound card WE RECOMMEND: Pentium 333MHz, 64MB RAM, Direct3D-compatible video card with a minimum of 8MB memory, 56.6kbps dial-up connection or better for Internet play MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 8

Activision dips into the retro-vehicular homicide well once again, but this sequel slips a gear below the original.

Maybe it's because it had a very tough act to follow. Perhaps it was all the hoopla generated by eager fans dying to get their hands on the sequel to one of their favorite games. Or it could be that we gamers have grown so accustomed to mind-blowing 3D graphics that anything less than state-of-the-art will satisfy.

Whatever the reason, one thing's for certain: *Interstate '82* never grabs you by the throat and pulls you completely into its alternate universe of high-speed automotive combat the way *Interstate '76* did. That doesn't mean it fails on all counts; stick with it long enough, and you'll find some pretty gratifying drivin' and shootin' action, along with a wacky plot chock-full of references to 1980s culture and politics. Unfortunately, it's a safe bet that a lot of gamers — especially ones who expected all the same gameplay elements they loved in *Interstate '76* — might give up before they reach that point.

Things get off to a rocky start in, of all the places, the intro sequence. It's not at all a case of hammy voice-acting or poor writing; indeed, the entire sequence is tense and gripping, and the acting's just fine. The problem is how it *looks*: dark, grainy images with almost no sense of detail, and background textures that seem to swirl and bleed together. Jeez, this is a *non-interactive* segment — can't it look better than what we'd have seen four years ago?



Apparently *round* tires for jet airliners hadn't yet been implemented in the alternate universe of *Interstate '82*.

Well, at least the quality's good enough that you know what's going on: Groove Champion, hero of *Interstate '76*, is trying to reach his sister Skye on the phone when two goons (one's got a Mohawk, so you *know* it's 1982!) burst in with guns pulled. Groove manages to dive out the window of his ratty trailer in the desert and make it to his ride, but before he can pull away he skids out of control and *wham!* — all we know is that our man "Swinger" is definitely *not* all right.

You play as Taurus, the smooth-talking soul brother who handled your training in *Interstate '76*. You have to team up with Skye to find what's happened to her brother and who's responsible. Just as in a Bond flick, you'll have to drive and fight your way not only through a steady stream of regular bad guys, but also a series of successively tougher head honchos — and of course there's a lot more on the line than the lives of Taurus, Skye, Groove, and Skeeter the mechanic (yep, he's back too).

The plot ultimately ties in covert international intrigue, Contras, and Ronald Reagan himself. It unfolds to the beat of an original DEVO soundtrack unearthed from the band's stashes. The ambience is certainly apparent, but '80s schtick isn't enough to warrant an all-new game.



Though primarily an action game, there are a few nice puzzles in *I-82*, like using a blasted trailer as a ramp to enter a shopping mall.

The big letdown as far as *I-82* goes is in how the designers chose to streamline the original's wealth of options. In an effort to make *I-82* more accessible, much of the nitty-gritty of specification and weapon loadout has been removed in favor of generic customizations. While this definitely allows you to move through the setup sections fast and get right to the fighting, it weakens both the fighting and the overall game by denying fans of the original the fun of car customization.

Beyond that, *I-82* just seems to emphasize the goofy more than the gritty, and loses a lot of its predecessor's punch in the process. The Las Vegas levels are intended as show-stopping set pieces, but the only reason they stop the show is to make you shake your head in disapproval at the oddball scenery. Some of the underground sewer levels and the fantastic Area 51 level show off some wonderful design, but too much of the game is spent blasting through areas that seem intent on making you moan with their cuteness.

All in all, *Interstate '82* just made me nostalgic for the original. Maybe it's just further proof that the eighties were a disappointment.

—*Stephen Poole*

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

68%

HIGHS: Robust multiplayer mode; loads of vehicles; twisting plot.

LOWS: Average graphics; weak sound effects; too streamlined.

BOTTOM LINE: *Interstate '82* definitely has its share of excitement, but falls short of what its predecessor delivered.

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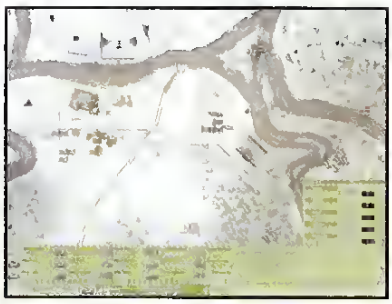
Close Combat IV: Battle of the Bulge

CATEGORY: Real-time strategy **DEVELOPER:** Atomic Games **PUBLISHER:** SSI, Inc., (408) 737-6800, *www.ssionline.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 16MB RAM, 45MB hard-drive space, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 200, 32MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play: IGZ, Maximum players: 2

Do we *really* need another Battle of the Bulge game? Well no, but when the game in question is this good, that's almost irrelevant.

To tell the truth, I was not eager to review this game. Starting with Avalon Hill's boardgame (circa 1965), I've played/reviewed so many Battle of the Bulge games that I really didn't want to revisit that campaign yet again. I mean, it *always* turns out the same, doesn't it? Initial German success, grinding siege of Bastogne, Panzers run out of gas, skies clear, Germans get hammered from the air, Germans lose. The Germans always lose, unless you give them a huge, historically inaccurate advantage, in which case you're no longer dealing with a simulation of the real Ardennes Offensive.

So maybe the highest compliment I can pay *Close Combat IV: Battle of the Bulge* is to say that it manages to avoid a deadly been-there, done-that syndrome. Paradoxically, by focusing on a wide variety of tactical situations, it manages to convey the flavor of the Ardennes campaign without making you feel straitjacketed by the larger historical constraints.



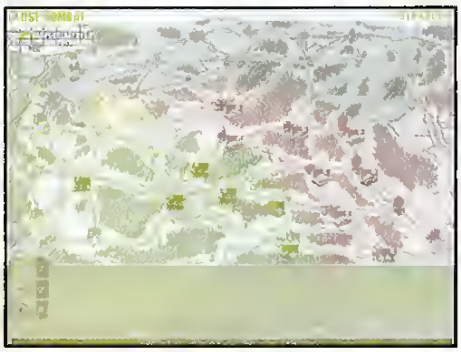
Be careful with your tanks — infantry units can take them out at close range.

Also paradoxically, Atomic has revamped the campaign structure to make the evolving situation clearer. The whole battlefield is divided into some 40 sections, each corresponding to an important tactical node, and after the opening round of German attacks you'll have lots of choices as to where and how you'll fight each new battle. Gone are the squad-by-squad replacements seen in the earlier games; instead, you're presented with *kampfgruppen* (battle-groups) formations, each of which has its own reserve units and supply caches lumped together in a pool. If one of your squads has its full compliment of armor, you can't over-assign vehicles to create super-units (all-tank units eventually dominated some *CC III* battles to a ridiculous extent). To have any chance of winning, the Germans must capture American gasoline dumps; and when individual squads run short of weapons and ammo, you can see them "scavenge" from the dead.

The AI is surprisingly aggressive, although it seems much sharper handling American defenses than it does managing German attacks. It *will* make devastating use of the "ambush" mode, especially in street-fighting situations. Infantry on both sides display a much-improved ability to destroy armor at close range (historically accurate by this stage of the war). AT guns definitely score more often when firing on the side or rear of enemy tanks. Off-board artillery (for the Germans) and air support missions (for the Allies) are available when supplies and/or weather permits.

Graphically, *CC IV* lives up to the high standards of its predecessors. The snowy forested terrain looks bitterly cold (you can almost hear the wind moan through the pines), and the myriad Belgian villages seem to be of plausible size and appearance. All the usual war-movie vignettes are here: grenade attacks, surrenders, tiny bazooka rockets, shattered units skulking under cover, etc. By now, Atomic's artists have this stuff down cold.

There are idiosyncrasies, though, which are sure to bother some hardcore grogs: too many flame-throwers and rocket-firing halftracks, too many spasms of wretched path-finding on the part of German vehicles, and a persistent tendency for Shermans to knock out Panthers with one shot (historically, it was just the opposite), but I guess you have to take into account that hardcore veteran players are not likely to be attracted by another Battle of the Bulge game.



The new campaign map makes it easy to see the strategic changes from battle to battle.

If you're mainly interested in tactical challenges presented in colorful environments, you'll get your money's worth. If your primary interest is in the actual Ardennes campaign, be aware that despite Atomic's slick new presentation, the Germans *still* lose (unless you give them every possible handicap). Also be aware that the multi-player experience is hamstrung by the predetermined replacement pools.

If you're not hopelessly burned out on the subject of the Bulge, you'll find this to be a solid and frequently exciting wargame. If you are...well, you've probably skipped reading this review, haven't you?

—William R. Trotter

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

84%

HIGHS: Plenty of colorful tactical action; great AI.

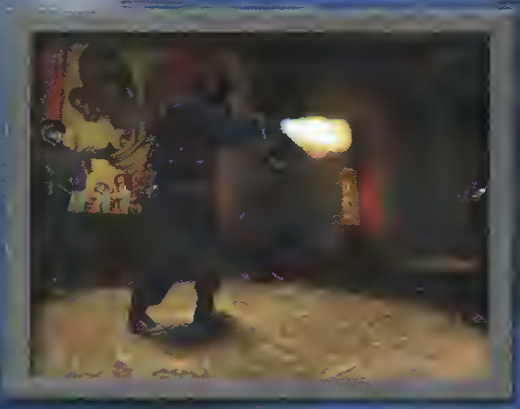
LOWS: It's still the Battle of the Bulge, and the Germans still always lose.

BOTTOM LINE: It's better than expected, but let's hope that Atomic's next game breaks some newer ground.

"This game rocks, you



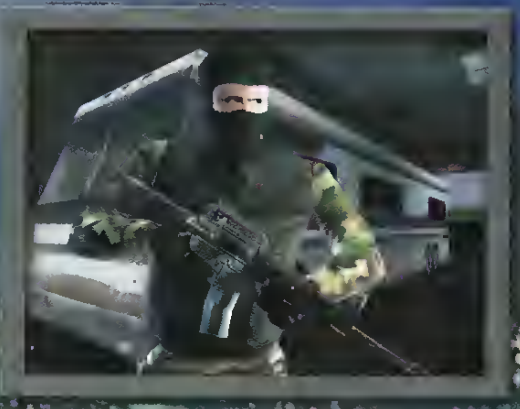
First stop on any mission is the pre-assault briefing. Here you'll receive the latest updates on the current crisis, configure your team's arsenal, and determine your entry port and tactical approach to the target location.



Systematically search each environment, or take command to breach and clear each location until you find your suspect. As the Element Leader, stealth and dynamic tactics are just a keystroke away when commanding your five-man team.



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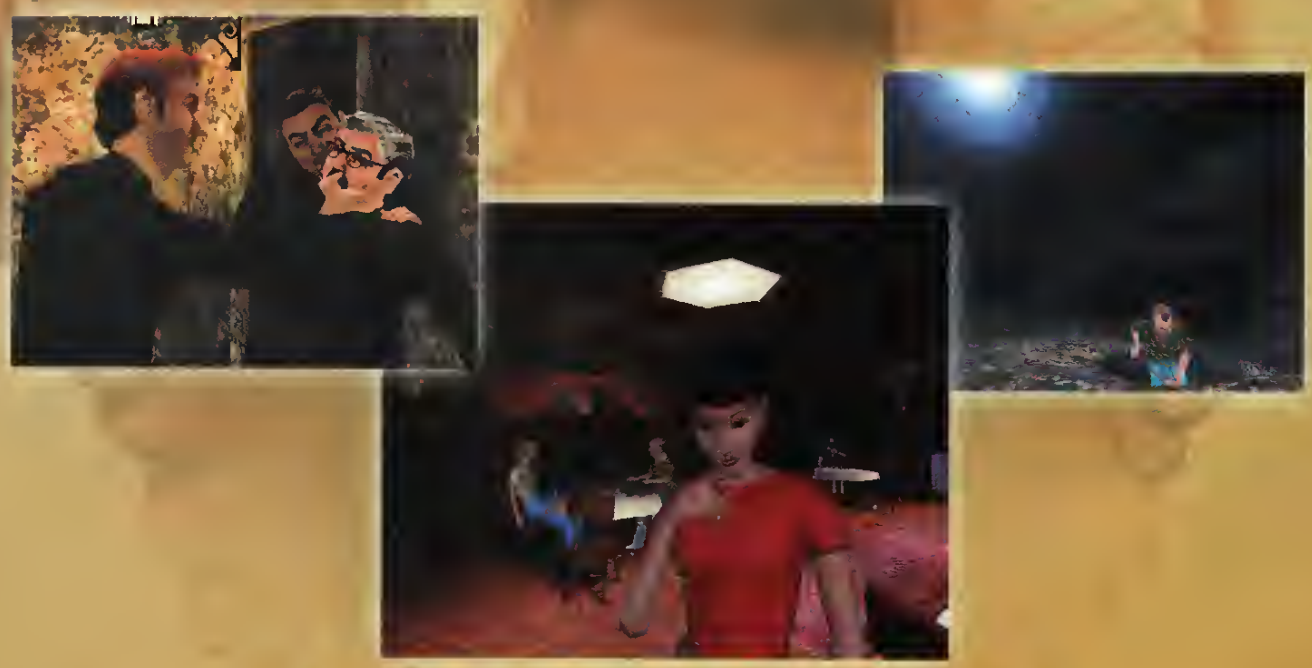
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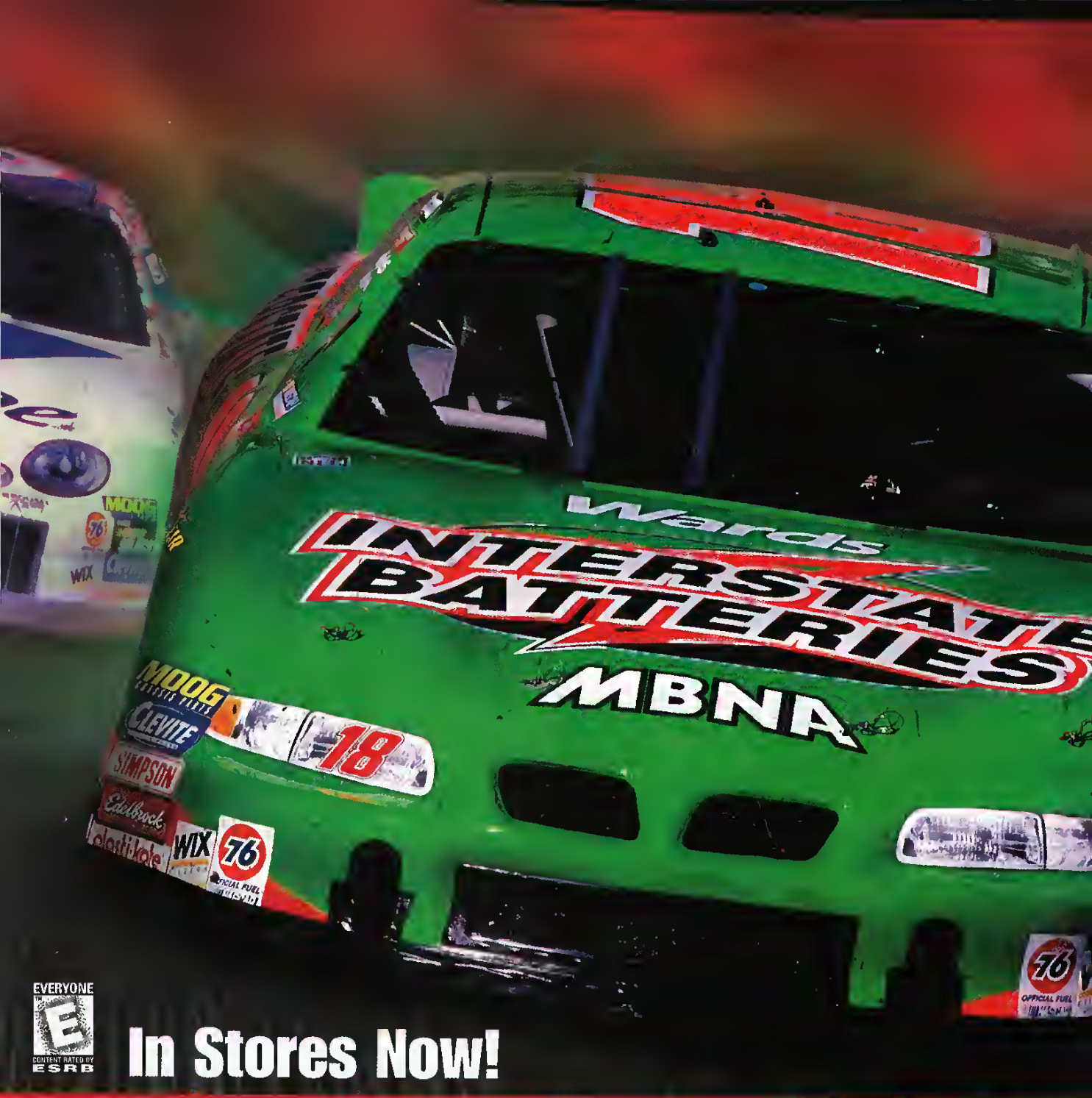


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FIFA 2000

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** EA Sports **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports, (650) 628-5999, *www.easports.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 16MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 50MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 266, 64MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM, 375MB hard-drive space, 3D accelerator card, Gamepad **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, IPX, Maximum players: 20

EA Sports once again demonstrates why it boasts the only real soccer game in town.

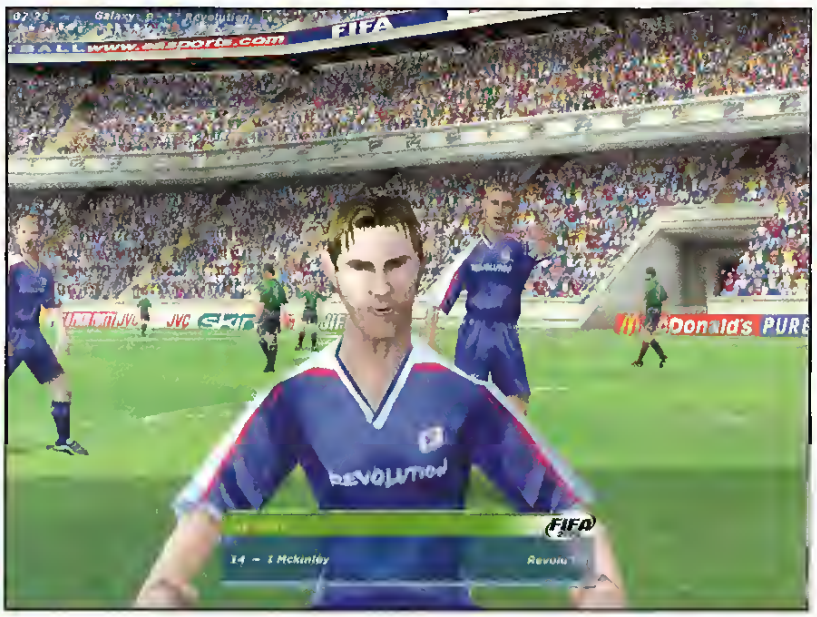
FIFA 2000: Major League Soccer (MLS) is the sixth version of EA Sports' venerable soccer game. Ever since the first *FIFA* hit in 1994, the series has almost always been at the forefront of critics' Best Sports Game lists. This year *FIFA 2000* has added the MLS license to the game and sent an already strong franchise into the stratosphere.

I was very excited when I found out that EA Sports had acquired the MLS license. MLS, in case you didn't know, is the official "Division 1" soccer league in the USA. This is a huge marketing plus for the title here in America, but unfortunately the game doesn't fully use the license to its potential — it's more like an afterthought and was seemingly thrown in after the game was completed.

The game itself has plenty of options to choose from, including standard exhibition, league, and Cup games (all of which can be customized). The gameplay has been slowed down a tad from last year's ping-pong action, but I still think it should be even slower. The emphasis is definitely on passing the ball to get an open shot on goal, but you can still make frequent end-to-end runs. Even though you can no longer choose in-game offensive tactics, and are reduced to four skills instead of more than ten from last year, the game is very satisfying even at the unrealistically fast pace. The ball physics are great, and you won't find a better action game of soccer anywhere.

FIFA 2000 gets frustrating when you try to set up your own MLS league. The only way to play in an MLS league is to create your own league, which for some arcane reason does not have the real-life MLS rules, playoffs, or divisions. The MLS rosters are not complete by any means. For example, the New England Revolution's roster only has one goalkeeper and places many starters like Mike Burns and Ivan McKinley on the bench. Yes, you can modify this, but it's very annoying.

The graphics in the FIFA series have always been spectacular, and this year's model is no exception. Even though it may be hard to believe, the graphics are even better than last year's game, right down to the headbands on the individual players. If you're familiar with the team you select, you can easily recognize who the players are just at a glance.



The graphic detail for the players is stunning, right down to the lackadaisical stubble on Ivan McKinley's face. Come on, Vy, at least shave before the game!



Corner kicks are a great scoring opportunity — lob tha ball in and get a striker's head to it!

The sound this year, however, is a major step backward compared to previous editions. From the dull Robbie Williams title song to the in-game commentary, it's an all-round disappointment. This year EA decided to "Americanize" its FIFA game even more by ditching the expert commentary from John Motson and Andy Gray that we heard in previous editions (they're now heard only in European versions of the game) and instead signing up ESPN announcer Phil Schoen and U.S. Women's Team member Julie Foudy to go into the broadcast booth. Phil sounds exactly like he does on ESPN, which is to say, um, not very good. He doesn't mention players by name except on very rare occasions, and something seems wrong when an American is calling an English Premiership game. It seems to me that Phil and Julie were given John Motson's old script, because the sayings sound exactly like last year's game — except that there are less of them. I recommend you turn off the commentary altogether.

Though it's not exactly a perfect MLS league sim, *FIFA 2000* is still well worth buying on the strength of its rock-solid gameplay and unimpeachable graphics. If you don't care for MLS, I'd strongly recommend hunting down the European version because it has much better play-by-play. Here's hoping EA makes full use of the MLS license — and brings back the expert commentators — in next year's model.

—Dan Clarke

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

88%

HIGHS: Amazing graphics; great variety of leagues and teams; exciting gameplay.

LOWS: Inadequate and boring play-by-play; inaccurate rosters.

BOTTOM LINE: Even with its faults, no other soccer game can come close to *FIFA 2000*.

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Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

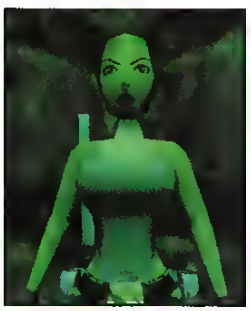
CATEGORY: Action **DEVELOPER:** Core Design **PUBLISHER** Eidos Interactive, (415) 538-0999, *www.eidosinteractive.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium II 266 (Pentium II 233 w/hardware acceleration), 4x CD-ROM, 16MB RAM, 4MB video card, 1MB hard-drive space **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 450, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS** None

Eidos' venerable vixen is back again...but this series' essential spark has long since flickered and died.

Regular as clockwork, a new *Tomb Raider* game is released annually with concordant marketing hoopla, conveniently accessible just prior to the winter holiday shopping season. 1999 was no different, as the fourth game in the celebrated series arrived with as much multi-media hype as we've come to expect. But once you look beyond all the fancy bus ads and billboards, the question remains: after four years with only minimal upgrade work done to each new installment, has Tomb Raider gone stale?

This time around, the world's most popular silicon (and, presumably, silicone) based adventurer mistakenly sets free the Egyptian god Set from its 5,000-year old imprisonment. Now Lara must lock away the spirit again before the world is destroyed by its wrath. Thrown into the mix is Dr. Werner Von Croy, Lara's arch-rival, who vows revenge on our femme fatale for leaving him trapped at the start of the game, and there are a few good plot twists woven throughout the story, told via the now ubiquitous rendered cutscenes. And for serious fans of this series, *The Last Revelation* sheds some light on what spawned Lara's career as an archaeologist in the first place; the (mandatory) tutorial goes back in time with Lara as a sixteen-year-old. A nice touch indeed, but for those who already know how to jump and swim, this is a waste of time, and it should've been left optional as with past incarnations.

Gameplay is about the same as past Tomb Raider diversions: exploration, shooting bad guys (human, animal or other) and solving environmental puzzles along the way. There are a few new moves and minor gameplay tweaks in *The Last Revelation*, but they don't really add up to much of an improvement in the grand scheme of things. Lara can now swing from ropes, shimmy up poles, and crawl in tight spaces. Inventory objects must be occasionally combined as well, such as two pieces of an item, or by fusing laser-sighting to a revolver to accurately plug skeletons in the head. There are more puzzles to balance the action than in the previous games, and to Core's credit, none are too obscure. And fortunately, gamers won't be forced to traipse around a huge map to find the solution to nearby conundrums, as experienced in last year's disappointing *Tomb Raider III*.



Expect a curvier protagonist this time around, as seen in this close-up.

The jeep and motorcycle-based sections featured here may not be novel to the Tomb Raider series, but one of the nail-biting level climaxes in *The Last Revelation* surrounds an intense high-speed chase atop a moving train. Kudos to Core for pulling off such a memorable sequence.

Visually, there's been a few noticeable improvements to Lara's appearance thanks to single-skin technology. Essentially, this means a smoother-looking lead character without the sharp corners on her elbows and knees, among other, um, female traits. The environments, however, look much the same as in past games, even with the implementation of bump-mapped surfaces. The lighting effects have been enhanced considerably, which is especially noticeable as there's more actual tomb-raiding in this sequel, so sunlight seeping into a crack in the ceiling adds welcome atmosphere. Any way you slice it, though, it's the same old game engine with just a few modifications. It's time to scrap the code fellas, and start anew. After all, you can only add a new layer of paint to the same car so many times.



After a swim, look closely and you'll see water droplets drip off Lara's body...another minor graphical enhancement.



The cut-scene sequences are some of the gaming industry's best, with inspiring pre-rendered animation and good voice-over talent.

A few annoying shortcomings still remain: control niggles such as having to be perfectly lined up with an object to pick it up or manipulate it, clipping problems where Lara may lose half her body in a wall or another large object, and the shifting cinematic camera angles that sometime hinder the action onscreen instead of enhancing it.

Save for the first *Tomb Raider*, released back in 1996 to an audience of gawking male adolescents (ourselves included), *The Last Revelation* is the best in the series...but that's not saying too much when most gamers admit that the series has been in free-fall for years. Undeniably, Core Design created a winning formula and has since milked it for all it's worth, but at the expense of innovation in both graphics and gameplay. Let's just hope we can get a new and improved *Tomb Raider* and Lara Croft 2.0 for the next century, instead of a rehashed cash-cow from the past.

—*Marc Saltzman*

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Slightly improved graphics; a solid story; good atmosphere; some memorable moments.

LOWS: Control still a problem; same ol' game engine with minor facelift; no real innovations.

BOTTOM LINE: An above-average Tomb Raider experience, but it's the same old game.

Flight Simulator 2000

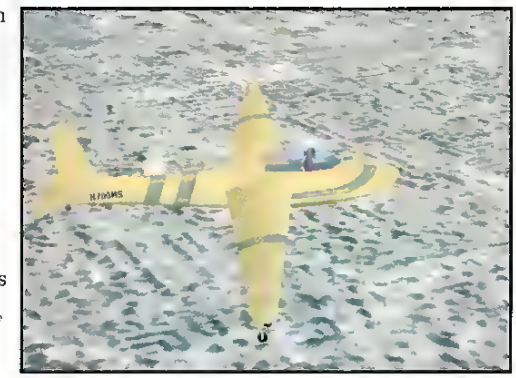
CATEGORY: Flight sim **DEVELOPER:** Microsoft **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft, (425) 882-8080, *www.microsoft.com/games* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 32 MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 420MB hard-drive space, Windows-compatible sound card, **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 500, 128MB RAM, 12MB 3D accelerator, 500MB hard-drive space, Joystick, Throttle, Rudders **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play IGZ, Maximum players: 2

Microsoft loads its new version of *Flight Sim* with features, but some may end up feeling merely overstuffed.

Microsoft *Flight Simulator 2000* is a tough call, since your enjoyment of its stunning array of features will be directly proportional to the power of your system and your patience with bugs. If you have anything less than a Pentium III 450, 128MB RAM, and the best current accelerator card, you can expect low framerates, long load times, and frequent crashes. If you *do* have the horsepower, you can expect some of the best civil aviation gameplay in town.

The Flight Sim graphics engine has been rebuilt from scratch, and it's top-flight (if you'll excuse the pun). But it's the other enhancements that make this a much more powerful sim. Among these are the addition of new planes and the improvement of flight models across the board, the expansion of the airport database, six highly detailed cities (and six more in the Pro Edition; see sidebar), improved weather modeling, more configuration options, and a stronger focus on training. Fans of the series will still recognize it as *Flight Sim* from the antiquated drop-down menu (which is overdue for retirement) and the overall feel of the package, but changes and improvements have impacted every single aspect of the sim.

As revered as the Flight Sim series is (it still remains one of the best-selling franchises of all time), recent versions have been excessively sloppy. The last, *FS98*, ran like a dog even on the top systems of the day. This tradition of poor coding has continued into the present, with an ambitious design humbled by slipshod 3D performance. As visually beautiful as *Flight Sim 2000* is — and it is without question one of the finest-looking flight sims ever — much of that beauty is simply wasted because flight turns into a slide-show. Even set to medium detail levels and using just about the most powerful consumer-level system on the market, I experienced some pop-in and visible texture smoothing. I shudder to think what a lesser system would yield.



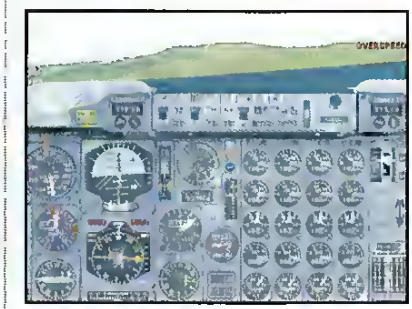
If wandering aimlessly over the modern urban landscape is your cup of tea, then you'll be well-served!

It does, however, look pretty sweet. The six complete cities are London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Chicago. Gone are the texture blocks, replaced by a quite effective elevated terrain mesh approach. This provides sharper terrain visuals, more plausible elevation levels, and a better integration with objects. Object models look terrific (particularly the landmarks) and no longer appear to be plopped onto a texture. The eye candy goes even further with nice fluffy clouds (you can even set the cloud *types*), good lighting effects, and evocative weather. *Flight Unlimited* still does weather better visually, but this is a close second. Scenery load times were okay on my system, but I understand these dive into the 30 to 90 second territory for mere Pentium IIs. I didn't notice a lot of hits to the disc or hard drive in-game, which can dump performance into the gutter, but view-switching was somewhat slow and occasionally caused a lockup.

In the guts of the beast, the programming is much tighter. The two new planes in the regular edition are the 777-300 airliner and the Concorde. This



New York is one of six detailed cities that come with the regular release. Six more come with the Pro edition.



If there were any more gauges on this control panel, I might go stark raving mad.

www.DailyRadar.com

brings the total to 10 aircraft, plus the Jetranger III helicopter. Dazzling re-creations of instrumentation and handling make this a real treat (and a real challenge) to fly. You can even drop the nose on the Concorde! Cockpits have received a real boost in complexity and accuracy, plus full implementation of GPS systems. The moving map display is tied to both the GPS and a powerful flight planner, enabling the creation of cross-country flights with ease and accuracy

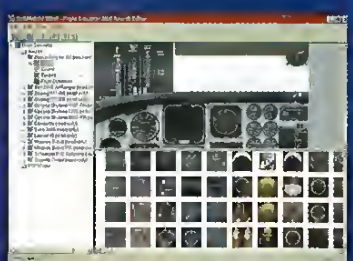
Flight models are remarkable, and weather modeling the best yet. When connected to the Internet, you can download current-real world flight data (provided by Jeppesen) right into the game, though this caused frequent lock-ups for me. A dazzling array of options allows you to adjust for any condition, flight type, or system failure on-the-fly,

The Professional Edition

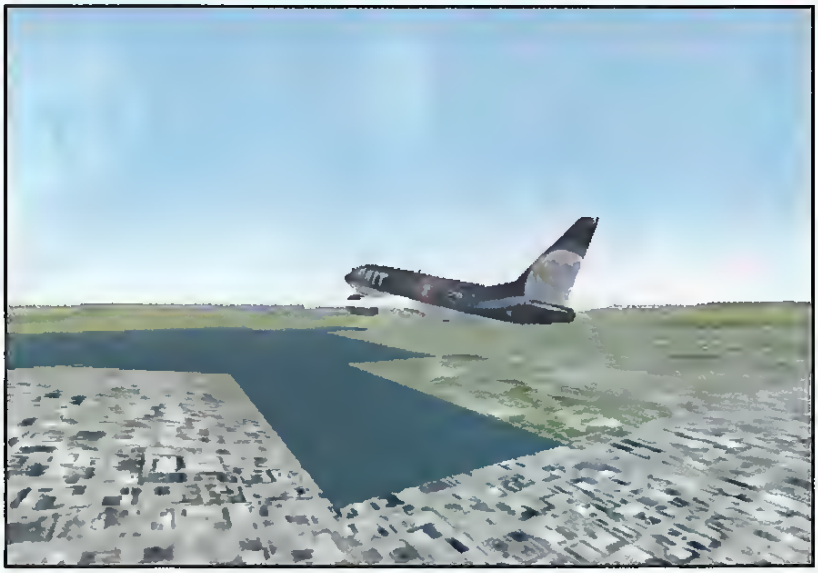
Flight Sim 2000 is available in two distinct varsions: Standard and *Professional Edition.* This "Pro" edition is geared toward the hardcore and thosa who want to use tha sim for supplamental raal-world flight training. It lists for $79.95 as opposed to $59.95 for tha standard adition. In addition to all the standard featuras, it includes:

- **Aircraft Editor:** A pretty straightforward intarfaca that lats you modify the cockpit, taxturas, flight propertias, and sound effects for each aircraft.
- **Six more datailed cities:** Boston, Rome, Seattle, Barlin, Tokyo, and Washington, DC.
- **Two more aircraft:** the Mooney Bravo and Raythaon King Air 350.
- **Two "training panels":** high-ras, larger-sized instrumant panel mock-ups for IFR training and proficiency.
- **Odds 'n ends:** Mora datailad printed manual gaarad toward flight training, extra CD-ROM with a demo of Cessna computer flight training tools, and some discount offers.

Evan if you're not interested in training, the two extra planes and six extra cities make it worth considering.



This Aircraft Editor comes with the "Pro" edition of *Flight Sim 2000* and allows users to heavily customize their aircraft right down to the look and sounds.



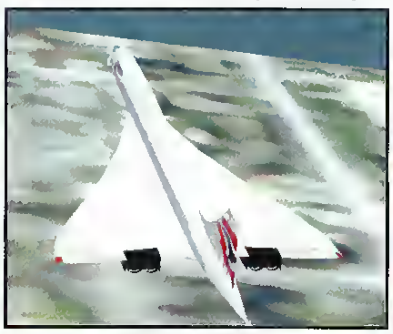
Thara ara more then 21,000 airports included in the airport database, which meens you can fly from almost any conceivable Point A to Point B in the world.

but I still find it irritating that you can still really only modify one type of flight parameter at a time without going back to the 3D engine.

The airport database is simply amazing, clocking in at more than 21,000 airports worldwide. These are better handled than in *Fly!*, with towers and other objects to eliminate that tarmac-on-plywood feel common in large databases

The lack of good cockpit and tower chatter is a major failing, however. To call it "sparse" is awfully generous. Other sims have made radio communication a major aspect of civil flight because it *is* a major aspect, but *Flight Sim 2000* has only the most rudimentary chatter and communication options. This is a gaping hole in an otherwise superlative design, and one that Microsoft needs to rectify if it intends to keep this franchise moving forward.

The final, and in an important way the best, major enhancement is in training. Movies, walkthroughs, and a detailed manual keyed to pre-constructed tutorial missions make this a serious first step to learning how to fly.



The Concorde is a beast to fly, and will serve as a test for your flying chops.

The Pro Edition takes this even further with more explanation and detail. A very complete online help file and documentation adds to the effectiveness as a training tool. It has finally reached the point where someone considering real-world flight training should make this his or her first step in the process.

Flight Sim 2000's long-lasting appeal is grounded largely in its openness as a system. a feature that continues in this latest version. Previous hacks, scenery, and custom aircraft can be brought forward into this edition, and the wide-open adaptability has remained. It's too bad that a design that covers almost every imaginable aspect of flight (save cockpit chatter) *and* looks so good should run so poorly on many machines. A little more time and craft expended on tightening up the 3D code could have solved this. People don't buy a new version of an old game just to turn off the new features. Yes, it means the game will have a longer competitive life and run on systems down the road, particularly since Microsoft will certainly patch it regularly. But that doesn't help us much now, when all we want is to fly around Dallas with six or fewer system lockups.

—T. Liam McDonald

Flight Sim 2000 *has finally reached the point where someone considering real-world flight training should make this his or her first step in the process.*

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

75%

HIGHS: Big, better-looking, and more accurate; lots of training materials and optiens.

LOWS: Obscene system requirements; crash bugs; rudimentary cockpit chatter.

BOTTOM LINE: *Flight Sim 2000* hasn't fulfilled all of its almost endless potential.



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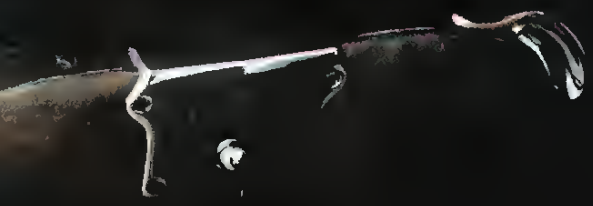




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Jane's F/A-18

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

CATEGORY: Flight sim **DEVELOPER:** Jane's Combat Simulations **PUBLISHER:** Electronic Arts, (800) 245-4525, *www.ea.com*
REQUIRED: Pentium 266 or Cyrix 6x86 or AMD K6, 64MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, 250MB hard-drive space (plus 100MB for saved games and Windows swap file), 4MB D3D graphic accelerator **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium II 350, 128MB RAM, 8x CD-ROM drive, 580MB hard-drive space, 16MB D3D supported accelerator card **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, Modem, IPX, TCP/IP, Free Internet play on Jane's Combat.Net, Maximum players: 8

In the face of some hostile action, the Jane's team continues to accomplish its mission.

Grace under fire. That's the best way I can think of to describe the efforts of the Jane's Combat Simulations' Baltimore crew over the past year. Despite watching many of their San Mateo comrades being dismantled and re-assigned shortly after *Jane's WWII Fighters* left the runway, and then witnessing the outright cluster-bombing of the former Texas-based Origin Skunkworks *Jane's A-10* team, they put these distractions behind them and persevered with their goal of producing a naval aviation sim worthy of the Jane's legacy. Surpassing the high standards set by past titles like *F-15* and *Longbow 2* is a Herculean task, but they have succeeded magnificently with *F/A-18*.

Jane's F/A-18 is not only the foremost naval aviation simulator to ever grace a hard drive, it's also one of the finest jet combat study sims of *any* type ever built. It should be made clear right up front, however, that *F/A-18* is not a product for casual flyers. Players seeking an *Air Quake*-style experience from within the cockpit of the Navy's latest multi-role fighter had best look elsewhere. *F/A-18* is a no-nonsense combat simulator that ambitiously attempts to model every aspect of the new F/A-18E Superhornet in all of its rich complexity. Although the sim's avionics and weapons modeling can be de-tuned slightly, there are still more than 180 individual keyboard and joystick commands to be mastered before the experience can be properly appreciated.



It's time to punch out. Explosion effects and damage modeling are handled superbly in *F/A-18*, just as you'd expect from Jane's.

One of the most compelling aspects of *F/A-18* is its remarkably authentic presentation of naval carrier operations. Whether you select one of the sim's Instant Action, Single Mission, or Training sorties, or delve straight into its large North Cape campaign, you will more often than not be faced with the considerable challenge of launching and recovering your Hornet on the deck of a constantly pitching and rolling aircraft carrier. Jane's has chosen to eschew the fully animated CAT launch crews that Digital Integration has employed in its competing *SuperHornet* title, but between *F/A-18*'s working jet blast deflectors, steam catapult effects, and LSO (Landing Signal Officer) interaction, there are potent reminders every step of the way that you're part of a mobile naval strike force.

Jane's combat sims have always set lofty new standards for authentic avionics and flight model fidelity, and *F/A-18* continues this tradition admirably. In fact, the Superhornet's avionics suite and weapons delivery systems are so comprehensively modeled that even the most grizzled of flight sim veterans will probably need to spend several hours with the sim's 200-page manual and training missions just to get up to speed. Utilizing a remarkably legible 3D-only cockpit, the individual MPD (Multipurpose Display) screens found in *F/A-18* offer the same level of functionality and authenticity one might associate with a full-blown military simulator. Line-of-sight radar, SEA surface search, multiple HARM launch modes, auto-tracking FLIR — they're all in place, and they all work as advertised.

Ultimately there is no substitute for hands-on practice with the plane's various radar sub-modes and target acquisition features. The surprisingly cryptic manual does a very poor job of offering a

SIX INNOVATIONS

Jane's F/A-18 **is to combat flight sims what *Quake* was to first-person shooters. Breathing new life into the bleeding-edge jet sim genre is a remarkable accomplishment, and *F/A-18* manages to stretch the envelope in six different areas:**

1 CARRIER OPS

Cat launches, moving decks, and "controlled crash" recoveries. Nobody's ever done it better.

2 AVIONICS

So you wanna take this bird for a spin? You may want to RTFM (read the f**ing manual) before you release those wheel brakes.

3 GRAPHICS

The nighttime pyrotechnics in *F/A-18* are positively stunning thanks to the sim's juicy real-time lighting effects.

4 WEATHER

Lashing thunderstorms and heavy cloud layers will remind you quickly that this isn't some Mediterranean pleasure cruise.

5 MISSION BUILDER

F/A-18's comprehensive Mission Builder utility effectively gives you access to the same powerful tools that the programmers used.

6 MULTIPLAYER

Fully integrated co-op and head-to-head Internet play on Jane's cost-free and lag-free matchmaking service redefines the term "multiplayer support."

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Setting up custom aircraft loadouts is like a visit to the candy store — it's *all* good.

"how-to" primer for flight sim newbies. Even hardcore simmers will find themselves hitting the pause key quite regularly just to pore through the fine print and look up the correct procedure to arm and release the Hornet's extensive collection of air-to-air and air-to-mud ordnance. It took more than 10 hours of stick time before I became comfortable with *F/A-18*'s interactive cockpit display (almost everything is mouse-clickable), but once I got the hang of it, the experience was intensely rewarding.

Ditto with the flight modeling. Although the avionics complexity in *F/A-18* can be dialed back a few notches to accommodate first-time flyers, there is no such option (or need) with the sim's physics engine. The advanced fly-by-wire characteristics of the E-model Superhornet allow the plane to practically fly itself, so even rookies should be able to push the outer limits of its user-friendly flight envelope quite quickly. A computerized Flight Control System (FCS) makes it very difficult to exceed g-limits or generate accelerated stalls in this bird, so the flight model is consequently quite forgiving and stable. Stable doesn't mean unsophisticated, however, as subtle changes in weather conditions or the aircraft's weapons loadout and fuel state will have a discernible and thoroughly plausible effect on its performance and stick response.

As with most serious flight sims, *F/A-18* also comes with an extensive joystick mapping utility to permit customization of its imposing collection of keyboard commands. A handy joystick axis profiler even allows you to alter the pitch, roll, and yaw response curves for your specific controller. Despite this helpful utility, I found that the sim's stick response was still much too touchy when attempting tricky carrier traps or mid-air refueling. I inevitably ended up chasing the stick during each of my failed attempts to link up



True to the Jane's name, comprehensive airframe and ordnance reference information is only a few mouse-clicks away.



Oh say can you see by the rocket's white glare? Weapons delivery is rendered with exceptional authenticity.

with the tanker, and after about the tenth wave-off I finally just blew the bastard out of the sky with a hail of 20mm cannon fire. Thankfully carrier traps can be tackled by the plane's fully automatic ACLS (Automated Carrier Landing System) which, as in real life, permits a hands-off, computer-controlled landing.

The superb real-time lighting effects that were used to such good effect in *F-15* and *Longbow 2* have been deliciously enhanced in *F/A-18*. Nighttime missile launches light up the exterior of the aircraft in a convincing flashbulb-like manner, and you will even encounter a cool glare effect off the "glass" of your MPD screens. Although not quite up to the standards set in *Jane's USAF*, the D3D-fueled terrain graphics are nevertheless very well done, and include such advanced features as reflective water and beautiful volumetric layers of cloud and smoke. Full weather implementation is also included, and the sensation of catapulting off of a pitching carrier deck into a raging thunderstorm must be experienced to be believed.

F/A-18's four-part semi-dynamic campaign takes place in and around the Russian Kola Peninsula and involves a solid mix of Fleet Defense, CAP, CAS, SEAD, and Strike missions. The North Cape is a very busy place once the game's shooting war heats up, and dedicated sim fans should delight in the highly immersive battlefield environment that the Jane's crew has created. A tremendously deep Comms menu has also been implemented, and the incessant radio chatter can be almost overwhelming at times. Adding further fuel to the sim's replayability is an enormous full-featured Mission Builder utility that easily rivals or surpasses anything currently on the market.

The North Cape is a very busy place once the game's shooting war heats up, and dedicated sim fans should delight in the highly immersive battlefield environment that the Jane's crew has created.

With free Internet connectivity in place at JanesCombat.Net, the co-op and head-to-head multiplayer component of *F/A-18* is equally impressive. I linked up with Jane's lead programmer C.J. "Smut" Martin for a couple of problem-free flights that demonstrated just how rock-solid Internet play can be when it's coded right. Although we had the advantage of an ADSL-to-cable hookup, beta testing reports would suggest that the dial-up connections for the game are every bit as smooth.

Despite some very minor imperfections, *Jane's F/A-18* is the most ambitious and well-crafted combat flight sim to hit the market since *Falcon 4.0*. Unlike MicroProse's earlier bug-stricken effort however, *F/A-18* is also one of the most stable pieces of software I have ever had the pleasure of test-flying. If the prospect of sliding into the imposing cockpit of the Navy's kick-ass new Superhornet appeals to you, then you can stop your search for that "next big sim" right now.

—*Andy Mahood*

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

93%

HIGHS: Very detailed; great flight model; convincing effects; full-featured mission builder; solid Internet play.

LOWS: Limited accessibility; cryptic manual.

BOTTOM LINE: The finest naval aviation sim ever produced for the PC.

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NHL Championship 2000

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** Radical Entertainment **PUBLISHER:** FOX Sports Interactive, (970) 522-5369, *www.foxsports.com/interactive/* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200 without hardware acceleration or Pentium 166 with hardware acceleration, 32MB RAM, 125MB hard-drive space, 8X CD-ROM, High-color capable 1MB PCI video card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 233, 64MB RAM, supported 3D graphics accelerator **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** 10 players via LAN, No Internet or modem games supported

This challenger to EA Sports' crown still has a way to go, but it's showing definite promise.

Next to EA Sports and its high-flying NHL series, Vancouver's Radical Entertainment (*Brett Hull Hockey '95*, *NHL Powerplay 96*, and *NHL Powerplay 98*) has been by far the most prolific developer of hockey titles for the PC. Its past titles have hit and miss in different areas, as does *NHL Championship 2000*.

Professionally appointed with all the audio-video trappings of a Fox Sports television broadcast and an impressive allotment of options, *NHL Championship* comes across as a high-class affair right from the outset. Users can customize individual graphic and sound settings, adjust resolutions to as high as 1024x768, tailor the rules in all key areas, and choose between three intelligently graduated difficulty levels. Trades and free agency only add to the possibilities, as do "sim" versus "arcade" modes and some basic coaching options. You can create a player from scratch and make him as superhuman as your heart desires.

But once on the ice, the game's weaknesses are evident in short order. Most notable is the truly defective line change procedure, wherein an entire unit must get themselves comfortably seated before the next line even hops the boards. This means unbearable delays when replacing lines during a play stoppage and completely open ice for the opposition when changing on the fly. What's worse, players begin to leave the ice immediately instead of waiting until it's safe to do so.



What Fox Sports hockey game would be complete without the Fox Trax puck streak? Here, a shorthanded Penguins team fires the puck down the ice to relieve pressure.

Radical has compensated for this obvious hole in the worst possible way; by making your AI opponents shockingly inept until a change is completed. That this temporary artificial unintelligence rears its ugly head whenever you find yourself at a two-man disadvantage borders on ridiculous. In the end, I was forced to play with line changes turned off. Grrr.

Radical's reputation for realism has thus far been superior to any competition — there are many who swear *NHL Powerplay 96* boasted the best AI ever put into a hockey game. Unfortunately, this rep may be compromised by *NHL Championship*. Bodycheck an opponent with enough force, and he'll catapult ten feet into the air. Drag the puck out over the blueline then back in again without incurring an offside. Whimper helplessly as goalies freeze pucks without provocation or penalty.

So why don't I give it a lower score? Simply because *NHL Championship* also does a lot of stuff right and sometimes even outplays the EA game. For the most part, it successfully recreates the thoughtful ebb and flow of the pro game and features some of the smartest players to ever grace PC hockey. Defensemen get inside the blueline, centers go to the net and wingers find openings with eerie authenticity. Granted, surging forwards can and will go offside, but that's far more realistic than the magical skates of *NHL 2000*.

And the game usually rewards carefully manufactured opportunity over dumb luck. Methodical passing plays, booming slapshots through an opening, breakaways, deflections, and dekes all work better than rapid button-clicking. *NHL Championship* has its gameplay perks too, such as double-clicking "dump" plays that don't travel so far as to bring an icing call, flip and drop passes, lovely spin-o-ramas, and realistic goal totals. And there's one final thing — it took me a very long time indeed to become even moderately successful, and that bodes well for long-term satisfaction.

Graphically, *NHL Championship 2000* is pretty fair in its own right, though expectedly short of the polish and raw excitement of its only real PC hockey rival. Player animations are jumpy — seemingly missing every second frame — and without dynamics. Goaltenders are the exception to this rule, with great glove hand and smothering routines, but otherwise everyone looks stilted and lumbering.

Unfortunately, *NHL Championship*'s only competition just happens to be one of the finest sports games in existence. And that reign remains unthreatened until Radical refines what is a very promising but still problematic effort.

—*Gordon Goble*



One way of dealing with Jeromir Jegr is to plant him face-first into the glass. Darryl Sydor does just that here, effectively stripping Mario Jr. of the puck.



The replay mode is far less sophisticated than that of EA Sports' NHL series, meaning you can't save or customize the views of goals like this one.

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

70%

HIGHS: Strong positional play and AI; slick TV-style presentation.

LOWS: Horrific line change routine, extra-large players, jumpy animations, sporadically "dumb" AI opponents.

BOTTOM LINE: Radical's knocking on the door yet again, but EA Sports still won't let 'em in.

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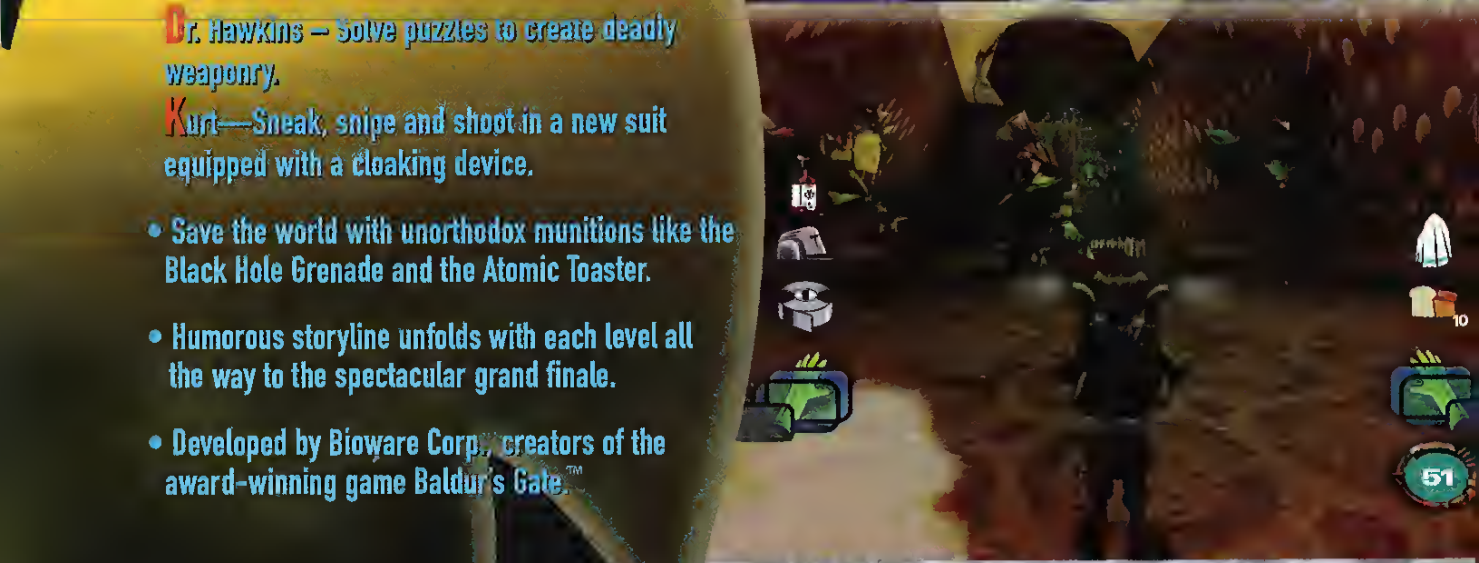
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Test Drive 6

CATEGORY: Racing **DEVELOPER:** Pitbull **PUBLISHER:** Infogrames, (877) INFOGRAMES, *www.infogrames.net* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 233MMX, 32MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM, 250MB hard-drive space, 4MB 3D accelerator card, DirectX 7.0 (included on CD) **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium III, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D accelerator card
MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: None

About the only thing that Infogrames' latest motorfest will test is your patience.

I've never been a huge fan of Infogrames' (née Accolade's) disappointing Test Drive arcade racing series, but after a lengthy spin with its 1999 model, the mild distaste I formerly harbored for this long-running franchise has turned into outright hostility. *Test Drive 6* is unequivocally one of the worst PC driving games that I have ever played.

I knew I was going to be in for a painful ride right after installing the thing. Snagging a bright red Jaguar XKR from the game's crowded showroom of licensed vehicles, I proceeded to enter a quick three-lap race against a small field of AI drivers. In a matter of seconds I was rudely introduced to the most horrific control scheme ever shoehorned into a PC racer. The smoothest and most well-intentioned of joystick deflections on my part while turning or braking would cause the car to execute an immediate snap turn to the left or right, and this situation only got worse as my speed picked up. After several backwards trips into the barriers, I ultimately decided to retire my MS Precision Pro USB joystick in favor of an analog Thrustmaster NASCAR Pro steering wheel and pedal combo.



A somewhat bland-looking upgrade screen is the place to buy and sell new vehicles before entering a tournament.

Still no go. The steering and braking response was every bit as scary with the wheel as it had been with the joystick. Switching to an analog CH Flightstick and then a digital gamepad proved to be a further waste of time. *Test Drive 6* doesn't offer any kind of controller null-zone adjustment, so you're stuck with a driving game that is, for all intents and purposes, undriveable right out of the box. I eventually went back to my original USB stick and resigned myself to driving a hovercraft with the hypersensitive steering response of a car doing 80mph in reverse.

Infogrames and developer Pitbull claim that *Test Drive 6* has been updated with a completely revamped physics model that gives each car its own unique handling characteristics. And while it may be true that the game's '69 Dodge Charger accelerates and corners differently than the '99 Dodge Viper, the use of "physics model" and *Test Drive 6* in the same sentence is oxymoronic to the extreme. There are no physics at work here at all. Each vehicle yaws around on a central axis like a well-oiled Lazy Susan and seems for all the world to be floating on a cushion of air that insulates it completely from the pavement.



This blocky-looking Aston Martin Project Vantage attempts to make up for its lack of detail with a high-gloss wax job.

This outlandish driving model completely undermines *Test Drive 6*'s key selling point — its enormous collection of 37 licensed sports and GT cars. The game's vehicle list contains some impressive vintage and current offerings from manufacturers like Ford, Plymouth, Lotus and others but choosing one over the other is akin to "test driving" an X-Wing or Y-Wing. Any similarity between the offered vehicle and its real-life counterpart is effectively limited to a rough-hewn external skin treatment.



Traffic can be a real pain at times, but you can handily bounce most of the slowpokes out of the way with a well-timed collision.

A number of different gameplay options are available, including a Cop Chase mode, Solo Race, Challenge, and a multi-race Tournament. The latter is a cash-based series of championships where you can upgrade cars that you've purchased with race winnings. Challenge events pit you against the clock sans any AI competition, and Cop Chase offers a "pull over the speeders" dash through the streets. No multiplayer option of any kind is available (not even split-screen) but this is probably a good thing because I would never want to inflict this sort of punishment on anyone that I know.

Test Drive 6 gains back a few points with its attractive collection of fantasy courses, but these lush D3D-enhanced visuals must be carefully fine-tuned at the options screen to avoid lengthy game-killing stutters and pauses. I was forced to turn everything down to the bare minimums in order to achieve a playable environment with my PII-300/Voodoo 3 set-up on some of the game's busier tracks.

Test Drive 6 is an unconscionably inferior title. Please, Infogrames, retire this ailing series before anybody else gets hurt.

—Andy Mahood

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

11%

HIGHS: Attractive course designs; tons of licensed vehicles.

LOWS: Horrific control; laughable physics; no damage modeling.

BOTTOM LINE: The worst excuse for a driving game to come out of the Test Drive factory (or any factory) in years.

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Abomination

CATEGORY: Real-time strategy **DEVELOPER:** HotHouse Games **PUBLISHER:** Eidos, (415) 538-0999, *www.eidosinteractive.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 166, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 233, 64MB RAM **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Play-by-E-mail, TCP/IP: 1-8 players, Modem: 2 players, Maximum players: 8

Shoddy gameplay, dumb AI, bad interface, lame graphics...well, at least Eidos got the name right!

It's always nice to find a new game in the squad-based combat genre that *X-COM* made great. Actually, let me rephrase that: it's nice to play a good squad-based combat game. You see, there's a wretched chunk of "gaming" filling up my hard drive right now called *Abomination: The Nemesis Project*, and I looked forward to writing this review as much as I gleefully anticipate getting hit in the face with a two-by-four *(Ed. note: Colin does not much enjoy receiving such blows).*

Let's fill you in on the background story: mankind has been ravaged by a super-virus that turns the average human into a drooling, blood-vomiting beastie. The only way to avoid being transmogrified into a walking chunk of meat is to join up with the Faithful, a mysterious cult that promises viral immunity to all of its members. The Faithful have taken over several northeastern cities, and the only people who can stop their Ultimate Goal of World Domination™ is a highly trained black-ops force. Your mission is to lead these agents to victory over the scum-sucking hordes of evil.



Here's one of the game's lousy interface screens. Great call-sign, Miss "Ninja." *Cough.*

So what we've got here is an army of commandos versus gun-toting zombies, which, in theory, *should* be cool. Unfortunately, the designers blew it big-time, and *Abomination* is an appropriately titled game if ever there was one.

The first thing you'll encounter is one of the most incomprehensible interfaces ever displayed on a monitor. You can click on a character or drag a box to select your commandos, and right-clicking brings up a maroon-on-red command box with obscure-looking icons. These can change your commandos' aggressiveness, firing orders, range attacks, and whether or not they will reload their weapons (why you'd have that last option turned *off* is beyond me). Unfortunately, none of these really do anything, as your group of manly ass-stompers has the collective IQ of a gerbil at the shallow end of its gene pool. And for heaven's sake, don't select a character and expect them to do anything — when a commando is highlighted, they won't even attack zombies who are shooting from point-blank range.



You've gotta love those giant towers of human and alien flesh. They blow up real good, and would make Paul Verhoeven proud.

In short, *all* of your team's movements must be controlled by the player, resulting in a mindless click-fest that's no fun at all. On the plus side, you can shift the game into a pseudo-turn-based mode by hitting the space bar: the action stops, and you can give characters orders in a leisurely fashion. This is a big help when your team splits up, since it's necessary to baby-sit each individual commando. Fortunately, the random foot soldiers who team up with you work on their own, and exhibit a level of intelligence much higher than your supposedly genetically superior commandos.



Four highly trained agents against one zombie is never a fair contest...unless the agents suffer from crappy AI, in which case the undead *always* win.

I guess it was apparent that good graphics couldn't really save this game, so nobody bothered trying. While the backgrounds are semi-atmospheric 2D bitmaps, the characters themselves are crudely detailed polygonal dudes who scuttle around with funny walks. The sound is also quite "unique," with shouts of "Die, mutant scum" and other unconvincing battle cries that sound like they came from microphones on the desks of drunken programmers. And all of this is set to an obnoxious soundtrack.

So is there a plus side to this squad-based time bomb? Well...the random mission generator is capable of creating several million zombie-blasting assignments, and there's the option to play a campaign via E-mail, if your machine is too laggy to cut the mustard for the real-time Internet play. Actually, I couldn't find a soul playing *Abomination* over Mplayer in the first place, so forget that.

Even though the premise of *Abomination* is cool enough, the atrocious interface and hackneyed gameplay aren't enough to do the scenario justice. While the game itself is stable and runs with nary a crash, so little is new, exciting, or even halfway-notable, there's simply no reason to buy this drooling zombie of a product. Next, please.

—*Colin Williamson*

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

34%

HIGHS: Good routing AI, extensive mission generator, no crashes.

LOWS: Absolutely nothing of interest, gameplay-wise. Stupid team members; crappy sound.

BOTTOM LINE: Dig out your old copy of *Syndicate* instead — you'll have much more fun.

www.DailyRadar.com

NBA Basketball 2000

CATEGORY: Sports **DEVELOPER:** Radical Entertainment **PUBLISHER:** Fox Sports Interactive, (970) 522-5369, *www.foxsportsinteractive.com*
REQUIRED: P200 (w/o 3D acceleration), P166 (with 3D acceleration), 32MB RAM, 85MB hard-drive space, 8X CD-ROM **WE RECOMMEND:** PII300, 64MB RAM, 220MB hard-drive space, 8MB 3D accelerator card
MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS: Hot Seat, Serial, IPX, Maximum players: 10

Try and remember the worst artificial intelligence you've ever witnessed in a sports game. Go ahead, I'll wait here for you. Okay, got it? Well, whatever game you came up with, you can forget about it now. We have a new champion and its name is *NBA Basketball 2000* from Fox Sports.

Regardless of the game's other plusses or minuses, it all boils down to the fact that there is absolutely no challenge whatsoever when playing against the computer, and the AI is truly MIA. You can literally take any player in the league — from the most dominant superstar to the lowliest bench-warmer — dribble down the court (pushing your "defender" along with you the entire way), position yourself directly under the basket, and slam-dunk the ball through the hoop. Every time. No steals. No fear of your shot being blocked. Nothing. It is truly sad. Things are minutely better if you get a few humans involved, but don't count on your computer teammates being any help.

As for the rest of the package, there's enough glitz to make you think you might have made a decent purchase...until you start playing the game. The graphics are decent (though the player movements are stiff, and they all look like they're wearing shoulder pads) and the overall presentation will kinda make you think you're watching a Fox Sports TV broadcast. Even the announcing is pretty good, with the dependable Doc Rivers providing the color commentary.

There's really very little point in going into any of the other details. After one game — hell, after one *quarter* — you'll be slapped in the face with the painful feeling that you've been taken, and if you're lucky, the local software store you bought the game from will exchange it for something — *anything* — else.

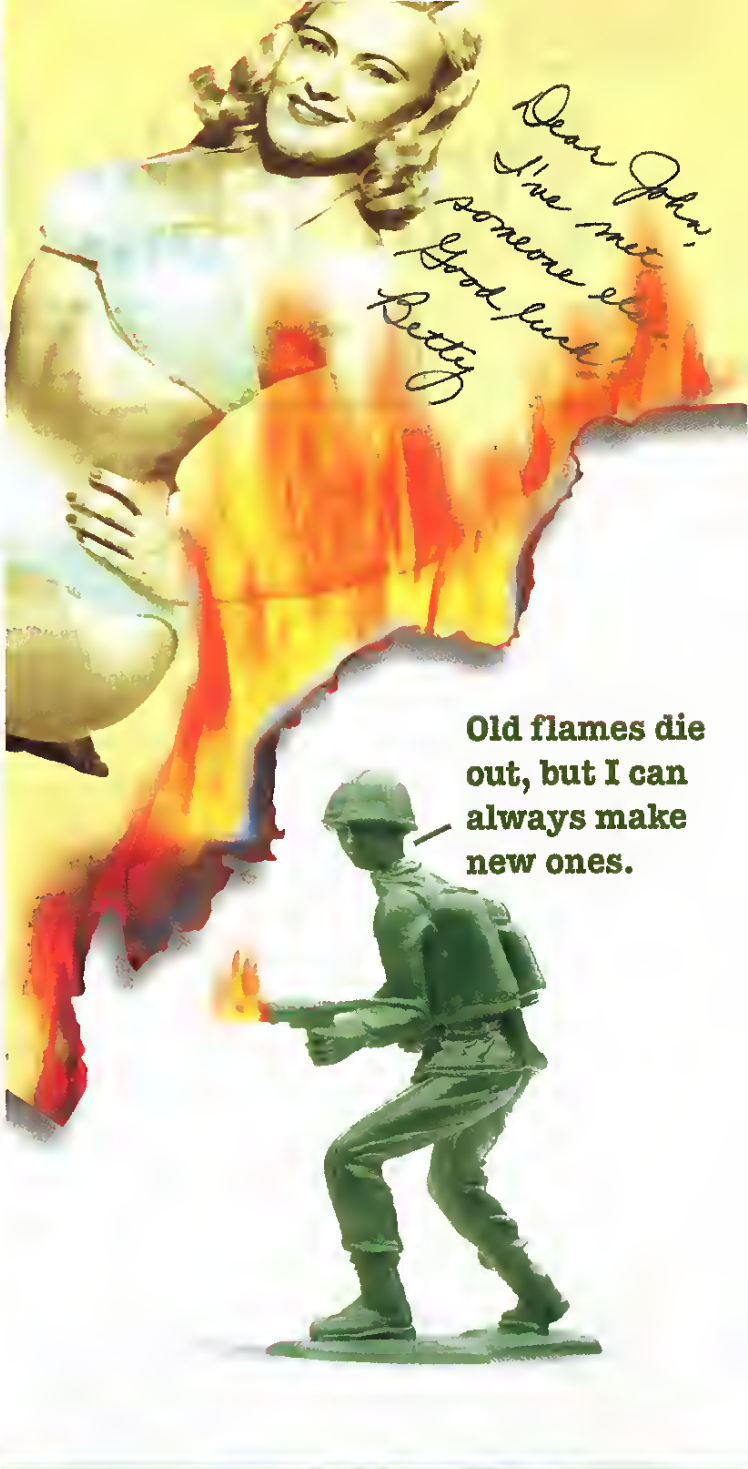
Even if there weren't two other (and may I add, far, far superior) options for PC basketball fans in EA Sports' *NBA Live 2000* and Microsoft's NBA *Inside Drive 2000*, there would be no way I could recommend Fox Sports' entry into the market. Phew, what's that smell? Oh, it's *NBA Basketball 2000*. Somebody open a window!

—Rob Smolka



Ho hum...another dunk. Thanks to a complete lack of computer AI on defense, you can do this at will. Oh, what fun!

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT 15%



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Star Trek: Hidden Evil

CATEGORY: Adventure **DEVELOPER:** Presto Studios **PUBLISHER:** Activision, (310) 255-2000, *www.activision.com* **REQUIRED:** Pentium 200, 32MB RAM, 4x CD-ROM, 285MB hard-drive space, Windows-compatible sound card **WE RECOMMEND:** Pentium 300, 64MB RAM, 3D accelerator **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** None

Activision's bold attack on the Star Trek franchise stumbles at the first hurdle with this lame pseudo-adventure.

I wish I had counted all the abysmal *Star Trek* games I've been forced to sit through (this *is* my job, after all) since 1994's *Judgment Rites*, the last good one. It must now total in the dozens. At least *Hidden Evil* isn't the worst. In fact, it looked primed to turn into an interesting game at any moment. Then it was over, and I was left with a box and a disc and a whopping four-hour hole in my day. (I understand the folks at Daily Radar nailed it in three, but they don't have a two-year-old in the house.)

Hidden Evil puts its worst foot forward with some mandatory combat training sequences. The engine is a 2D environment with 3D characters: an approach that rarely works (witness the missed opportunity of *Nocturne*). Training introduces you to the joys of phaser fire in such a world, requiring you to shoot while turning circles to figure out if the target is in front or behind you until the auto-targeting decides to kick in.

You also get to test the Vulcan Nerve Pinch by sneaking up on someone. This works fine in the tutorial, but people don't often conveniently present their backs in actual gameplay, so you'll rarely use it. The other two interface tricks are a tricorder, which points out things you should find yourself and gives them meaningless technobabble descriptions, and a communicator to talk to Picard and Data so they can tell you they're off somewhere making an actual movie and therefore unable to join in the game.

The story unfolds through chapters with absurdly easy solutions. Following the incidents of *Star Trek: Insurrection*, your character (a simple-minded junior officer) uncovers some alien technology, a portal, a bit of genetic code, and an evil Romulan plot to use all these things for something bad. They must have used a similar plot device in a couple dozen episodes, but hey, it works if you don't think about it too much. If you walk around you'll pretty much bump into all the answers, most of which involve, well, walking around. You can pick things up and use them until something happens, which is pretty quickly since there are almost no objects to pick up. Sometimes you may have to shoot at something, which may or may not be a creature that can be affected by phaser fire. Just shoot until you figure it out. Or don't. It hardly matters.

These side-splitting combat encounters are found in most chapters, and consist of several enemies running madly around the screen like ducks derailed from a shooting gallery. The difficulty level of these combat encounters is tied to the angle you're stuck in when you start. If you have a mostly top-down view, you'll be able to point in the right direction and the auto-firing will take care of the rest. If, however, the view is at 90-degree angles to your character, you can count on some serious depth perception issues. Objects sometimes get larger or smaller, so you can tell if they're moving closer or further away, but this helps not one jot since you rarely have a clear idea of relational positioning.



Here's one of the amusing combat sequences, wherein bad guys run back and forth until you can kill them. Even if they do get off a lucky shot at you, you're fully healed a few minutes later when you move to the next chapter.



There are ample opportunities for spastic Trekkers to geek out over the inclusion of gadgets like the trusty tricorder.



Every time your character activates the Vulcan Nerve Pinch he looks at his hands like his fingers smell.

The game looks okay, but the lack of depth perception hinders an already crummy combat dynamic. There's an interesting story and some attractive (albeit small) environments to explore, but if this takes you more than a few hours to complete, it may be time for you to load up that Jar-Jar game. For the same price as *Hidden Evil* you can buy six of the original Star Trek episodes or two movies and a case of beer and avoid the game-induced migraine altogether.

—T. Liam McDonald

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS: It looks decent enough; Data and Jean-Luc are aboard; the Vulcan Nerve Pinch is nice.

35%

LOWS: It would have been nicer if there were people to Nerve Pinch; easy gameplay, lame combat.

BOTTOM LINE: A clever child could solve this in the time it takes to watch two Trek movies. 'Nuff said.

www.DailyRadar.com



The look may be drab, but the racing is good, especially when you get a crowded field on a figure-eight track.

Dirt Track Racing

CATEGORY: Racing **DEVELOPER:** Ratbag **PUBLISHER:** WizardWorks, (425) 398-3051, *www.wizardworks.com* **REQUIRED:** P266 (w/o 3D accelerator), P200 (with 3D accelerator), 32MB RAM, 65MB hard-drive space, 4x CD-RDM **WE RECOMMEND:** PII300, 64MB RAM, 210MB hard-drive space, 3D accelerator **MULTIPLAYER OPTIONS:** Serial, IPX, TCP/IP, Maximum players: 10

We all know you can't judge a book by its cover, and now a similar axiom must be applied to game publishers. I'll admit to cringing more than a bit when I received my copy of *Dirt Track Racing* and seeing that dreaded white and red WizardWorks logo on the box. I mean, really — these are the guys that made bad hunting games fashionable as well as extremely profitable. But you know what? Despite its appalling pedigree, this game isn't half bad! In fact, I'd have to say that it's pretty darn good. Will wonders never cease?

Dirt Track Racing, from developer Ratbag (who gave us the enjoyable racer *Powerslide* last year) realistically simulates the sport of, you guessed it, dirt track racing. While it doesn't have the high profile of, say, a NASCAR, there are plenty of weekend warriors out there who compete just as hard as the professionals. And that's what this game does best; it really makes you feel like a participant in a dirt track league.

The physics model feels very accurate (and is highly adjustable if you don't like spinning out all the time), and the season mode includes everything you'd find in a full-featured sim at twice the price (the MSRP is only $19.99). There are myriad ways to tweak your car's performance, plenty of circuits to enter in three different racing classes, and a slew of other adjustable options to tweak the gameplay to your liking. The computer-controlled drivers behave realistically, and if you want some human interaction, fire up the network version of the game and have at it. The online performance proved very satisfying.

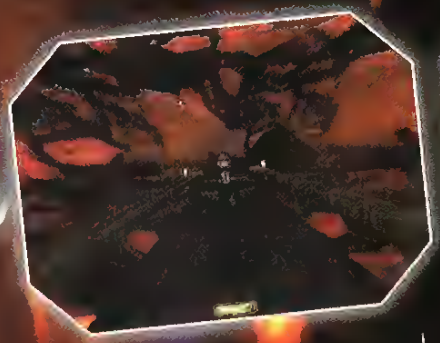
On the downside, the graphics, while serviceable, are drab, and the texturing on the cars is very basic. It kind of looks like the whole game was created using the original *Quake* engine colors. There are plenty of tracks, but they're all very short, and mostly uninteresting to look at. I know that it's realistic, but it does get rather boring after a while (which is probably why I don't have any inclination to try the sport for real). All in all, though, if you're a racing fan, it's easily worth the 20 bucks.

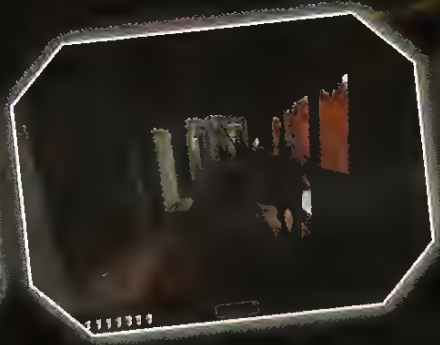
—Rob Smolka

PC GAMER FINAL VERDICT 82%



Interview with the Team of Thief II: The





"We think that Thief is really built around having the most sophisticated AI system available today."

STEVE PEARSAL - Project Leader

You have a pretty hard act to follow, with fans expecting a great deal of the sequel to Thief. Are you daunted by the task at all?

When we did Thief: The Dark Project we were really exploring a new genre, the first person sneaker, as we like to call it. Since no one else had really built a first person game around a stealth concept before, we had to do a lot of trial and error experimenting to find out what was fun and what didn't work so well. Now with the benefit of our experience from Thief I, as well as a lot of really good feedback from Thief I players, we are confident that we can take this whole concept of a "first person sneaker" to a higher level with a better tuned, more focused design and execution which we think will lead to an even more fun and immersive game.

In terms of gameplay, you've made no secret of the fact that you consider the stealth element of the concept to be the factor that ensured success for the original. How will you keep all those stealth addicts happy with Thief 2? What do you have planned in terms of interface innovation?

Well a lot of the new powerups or tools that we have planned are centered around making Garrett a better thief. We want to give the player more opportunity to scout out the mission areas so that they can come up with a more thought out plan instead of just reacting to what they run into. So you'll see some sort of Thiefly tool that allows you to see into an area without exposing yourself to being discovered by the AI's.

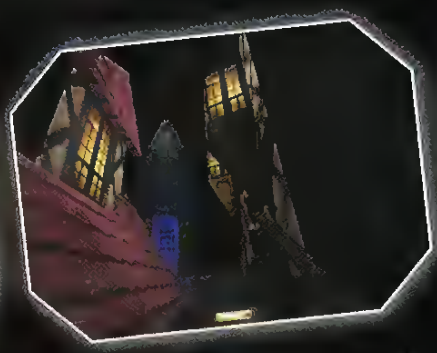
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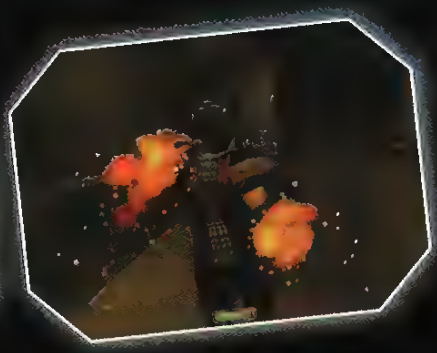
THIEF II

THE METAL AGE™

Metal Age







Can you detail the story of Thief 2? You mentioned Garrett was going to be involved in far more human-based missions. Can you elaborate on this? How important do you consider plot to be to this type of game?

We've got some great plot twists planned for Thief 2 and I certainly don't want to ruin anyone's surprise and enjoyment of how the story unfolds but basically you can think of Thief 2 as a three act play. In the first act Garrett is just trying to make a living as a master Thief but he runs into increasing interference from the city sheriff. In act two Garrett discovers why the Sheriff is hassling him so much more than in the past. In act three, Garrett uncovers the plans of the bad guys, leading him into a big confrontation with the boss bad guy. Garrett will be operating mostly in the city itself and so the missions will be set in more of a city setting. You'll see missions set in places you'd expect to find in a city, like rich people's mansions, banks, churches, and city streets.

How do you think Thief affected the FPS genre? Do you think Thief succeeded on the 'stealth factor' due to a stagnation in the genre?

The FPS genre has been moving towards games with more immersive gameplay set in deep, believable worlds. Thief succeeded because we were able to create a believable compelling world that supported our core gameplay concept that you become a master thief. A big part of that was that our AI's had to be good enough to convince the player that hiding from them was a believable and fun challenge.

Finally, what is it about Thief 2 that you hope will make it stand out from a considerable crowd? What are your plans after the completion of the game?

We think that Thief is really built around having the most sophisticated AI system available today. Thief's success is based on being able to simulate believable opponents to steal and hide from. No one else has AI good enough to really pull this off and we think it will be awhile before any one else can catch up to us – especially because we don't plan to sit still so there will be a moving target to catch up with.

Not only will the AI system in Thief 2 be the best you can get in any game engine available today, but because of our experience developing Thief 1 along with the feedback we've received from our fans we will be able to craft a better focused, more sophisticated stealth experience. In other words, we can take the whole core stealth experience to the next level.

Probably the first thing we will all do is take three or four weeks off and recuperate from the inevitable crunch time it takes to get a good game out the door. Seriously though, we will be working on taking the Thief franchise to a new level.

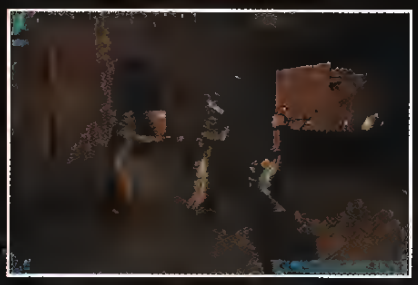
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Interview with Deus Ex team



What made you choose Latin?

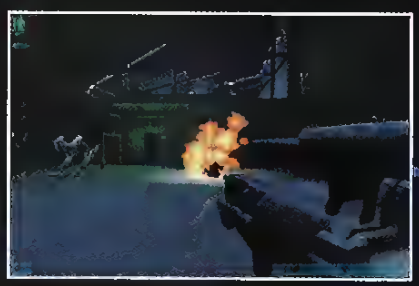
WS The phrase "Deus Ex" is a shortened version of "Deus Ex machina," a literary term I've always liked. Here's the dictionary definition (courtesy of the WWWebster online dictionary):

Main Entry: de·us ex ma·chi·na
Pronunciation: 'dA-&s-"eks-'mä-ki-n&, -'ma-, -"nä; -m&-'shE-n&
Function: noun
Etymology: New Latin, a god from a machine, translation of Greek theos ek mEchanEs
Date: 1697
1: A god introduced by means of a crane in ancient Greek and Roman drama to decide the final outcome.
2: A person or thing (as in fiction or drama) that appears or is introduced suddenly and unexpectedly and provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty.

But that's probably not what you were looking for...

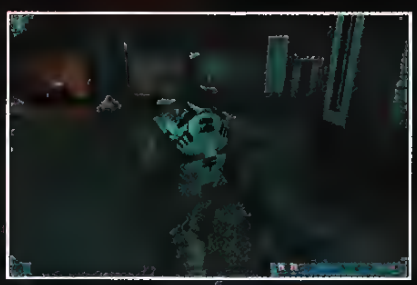
The fact that "deus ex" is Latin, translated from Greek, didn't really enter into the decision. We settled on the name because it actually rewarded knowledge – if you know what "deus ex machina" means, you know a little something about the game that other people won't know until they've played for a while.

Mostly, though, we chose "Deus Ex" because I thought it sounded cool and mysterious.



Storyline in games has become paramount nowadays. Can you give us a brief description of the story behind Deus Ex and why the story is important to Deus Ex's gameplay?

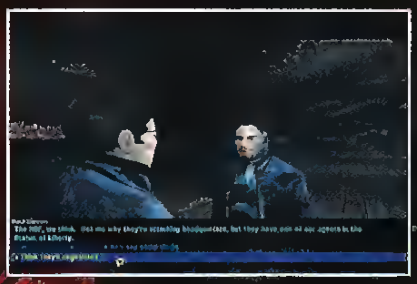
WS Well, we don't want to reveal too much about the story – have to leave some mysteries for players to solve! What we can say is that Deus Ex is the story of J.C. Denton – the player character – a guy who works for an international agency called the UN Anti-Terrorist Coalition. His job in our near future



world is to fight terrorists hellbent on hijacking priceless shipments of the only known treatment for a killer virus called the Gray Death. Little by little J.C. discovers that the terrorists may not be as bad as they seem. In fact, they make a lot of sense, once you start paying attention. And UNATCO? They seem a little bloodthirsty but they make some sense, too. It's all a little confusing...

As for why story is important, well, it provides context – meaning – for all of the player's choices. Plenty of games get by without much of a plot but they seem kind of empty and tend to devolve fairly quickly kill-everything-that-moves or experiences are limited to solve-the-next-goofy-puzzle. In Deus Ex, we want players thinking constantly about why they're doing what they're doing. We want them thinking how their actions might affect the people who live in our gameworld. A story filled with interesting characters with interesting lives has a chance of giving each player's actions some meaning.

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Everyone and their mother is talking about genre blending. What is genre blending to you and do you feel Deus Ex blends genres? If so which genres and how?

WS I don't know that we set out to blur the lines between genres. There's just something in the air these days, a sense that people -- developers and players -- are bored with the Same Old Thing. They've played traditional roleplaying games and adventure games and shooters and they're looking for something new. Combining elements from a variety of genres is one way to try to do something different, which keeps us interested, as developers, and (we hope!) will appeal to players, too.

We just wanted to make a game that didn't railroad players into guessing what the designers wanted them to do minute-to-minute. That pretty much dictated that we'd have real-time action, skill use and conversation -- and that right there pushed us into the "uncategorizable" category. More to the point, it means some people look at Deus Ex and see a shooter, others see a roleplaying game and still others see an adventure game. In the end, they're all right.

Does the blurring of genre lines make it easier or harder to balance and tweak gameplay? Is it possible to make a single game that pleases fans of several radically different genres? In other words, will Joe Shooter, Jane Roleplayer and Jackie Adventure-Gamer all find ways to enjoy their time in the world of Deus Ex?

WS Certainly, our goal is to ensure that fans of a variety of genres find something to like in Deus Ex. It's really for gamers to tell us how close we came to achieving that goal. I'll tell you, it's a heck of a tough goal! Balancing the gameplay so no one path or character choice is overpoweringly better than any other is a real challenge. The guy who blasts his way through every situation and the person who talks to everyone and kills no one must both have fun and must both have a chance of success. Tough, tough, tough...

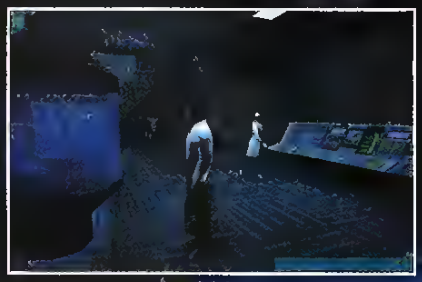
Given that Deus Ex blurs the lines separating a variety of genres, how would you describe the game so Joe (or Jane) Consumer can make an informed decision about whether he or she is likely to enjoy it?

WS The easy answer (at least for game geeks) is that I hope people can look back at some earlier games and say, "I liked those. Deus Ex is the next step in the evolution of games like that. I'll probably like Deus Ex." And what earlier games would I cite as our predecessors? Ultima Underworld... System Shock... Thief... HalfLife. I'm not saying we'll be as great as those games – though I hope we will! – but they're the games we took the most inspiration from.

For non-game geeks, I guess I'd say Deus Ex is for you if you want a game that really immerses you in an alternate world and lets you decide how to interact with the people you meet there and the situations you encounter.

What one message would you want to convey to gamers about Deus Ex?

WS Deus Ex is a game about character development in which all of your character choices are expressible, minute-to-minute, in gameplay and every choice you make has a price -- everything has consequences and nothing comes for free...



What features have been added to the Unreal engine that will set Deus Ex apart from other first-person 3D games?

AY Most of the features we've added to the engine have been RPG-centric. Since Unreal is a straightforward shooter, it doesn't have support for a sophisticated inventory system or the skills and augmentation systems your character has in Deus Ex. We've added blended animations, real-time lip syncing, advanced AI, a powerful conversation system (complete with a standalone editor), a traveling flag system to save the game state between maps, a sophisticated user-interface library that's used heavily by the many UI screens in the game, and countless other improvements.

You've mentioned AI and physics as things you've enhanced in the Deus Ex version of the Unreal engine. Has this led to any unexpected behavior on the part of characters or objects in the game world? Are you seeing any "emergent behavior" – things the designers didn't plan or anticipate? And, if so, is that a problem or a feature? Can you plan fun that's based on the unexpected?



SM Here's my favorite example of emergent behavior: I was standing on top of a three-story building with a pistol. Guards were patrolling below me, oblivious to my presence. I fired off a couple of rounds, which the guards shouldn't have heard because the pistol was silenced. But one of the guards drew his weapon, turned, and started looking around for me, because the shell casing from my pistol had fallen three stories and landed next to him, and he heard it. From my perspective as the AI programmer for Deus Ex, emergent behavior is a feature, not a bug. There's nothing cooler than doing something unexpected in a game and seeing it work the same way it would in our world. It makes the game world feel immersive and real.

You've said that character development is the heart of roleplaying. How important is character development to the Deus Ex experience?

WS All game problems in Deus Ex can be solved in more than one way and the choices you make about your character make certain kinds of problem solutions more viable FOR YOU than other kinds of solutions. In other words, if you're the guy who says, "I want to develop my weapon skills" you're likely to get through the game lugging around lots of weapons and creating all sorts of carnage. Conversely, if you're the guy who says, "I want to develop my computer skill" you're going to look for computers and ATMs and security systems to hack and probably avoid combat whenever possible. Character choices expressible in gameplay are what Deus Ex is all about. But the important part of that is "expressible in gameplay" as opposed to the bit about "character choices." Character development in and of itself isn't the point, really.

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HSCONTENTS

Y2K? Oy Vey!



It may be March 2000 for you, but for us over here at the *PC Gamer* offices, it's only early January — ten short days into the "new millennium" to be exact (you'd have to be a staff member over at *PC Accelerator* magazine to *not* know that the new millennium really begins in 2001). If you're anything like me (and let's face it, you probably aren't — I'm pretty much just a big, flabby idiot), you likely stayed home on New Year's Eve to see if the world was going to end. Or maybe you locked the doors and barred the windows to prevent the crazed mobs from trying to break into your home and steal your 475 pounds of freeze-dried chili macaroni and bottled PowerAde.

As you probably know by now (since I'm assuming that if you're reading this that you aren't, you know, dead), the New Year rolled on in with nary a hiccup. And what of the dreaded Y2K bug? Here at the office, the biggest problem anyone ran into was that some old version of Quicken that was on one dusty old computer wouldn't accept "00" as anything other than the year 1900. News web sites were so desperate to report on Y2K problems the morning after that I actually read a report of one ATM machine in Europe failing to dispense cash on January 1st. Oy Vey!

What does any of this have to do with the Hard Stuff? Well, because the world didn't end as I had planned, you get to enjoy yet another fine edition of the magazine this month!

Greg Vederman, technical editor



Three new video cards go head to head in our brand-spanking new reviews. Who will come out on top? Read on to find out. PAGE 132

REVIEWS

- ***ATI RAGE FURY MAXX*** PAGE 132
 Those zany Canadians are at it again with their newest 3D card. Can they compete with NVIDIA's latest? Read on and find out.
- ***DIAMOND VIPER II*** PAGE 132
 Another contender for NVIDIA's title is Diamond's newest Viper, sporting the power of S3's finest chip yet.
- ***CREATIVE LABS ANNIHILATOR PRO*** PAGE 133
 Hot on the heels of the Annihilator GeForce 256, the Pro is here, packing the power of DDR RAM.
- ***KARNA BOOMSLANG MICE*** PAGE 134
 Looking for the highest precision mice you've ever seen? Two new mice aimed at gamers get the once over.
- ***ALTEC LANSING ADA880 SPEAKERS*** PAGE 134
 Does Altec have what it takes to beat new-kid-on-the-block Klipsch at the PC speaker game? Does anyone?

How We Rate the Hard Stuff

You've been around long enough to know the greatest technology doesn't mean a thing unless it improves the games you love to play. Our reviews focus on real-world testing, but when a number is in order for comparisons, we use the benchmarking tools developed by our hardware-frenzied sister publication *Maximum PC*. Between our testing and the BenchMarks, we'll give you the lowdown on which devices perform and which ones fizzle.

PC Gamer's Editors' Choice Awards

Every month, we honor the best peripherals, utilities, and hardware we test with our Editors' Choice award. So when you see the *PCG* Editors' Choice logo on hardware at a local computer store, you can be sure it's among the best.

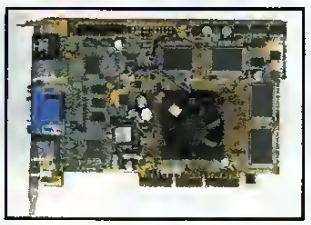
TRINITY

Check out all the up-to-date parts and prices *PC Gamer* recommends for low-end, mid-range, and high-end systems! PAGE 139



TECH Q&A

Why for can't I (as old Bill Shakespeare might say) talk about porn in the Hard Stuff? And why doesn't my video card work? I think you get the idea; enjoy the non-stop hijinx of this month's Hard Stuff Q&A! PAGE 140



Gratuitous Violence is 200 Times Faster With a D-Link Network Than With Online Games.



To get the Maximum performance out of a multi-user game, get off the Internet and get on a D-Link 10/100Mb Fast Ethernet Network. Up to 200 times faster than the Internet, and 10 times faster than other legacy networks. Easy to set up and install, a D-Link 10/100 Network In A Box comes with everything you need to build a Windows 95/98 Network.

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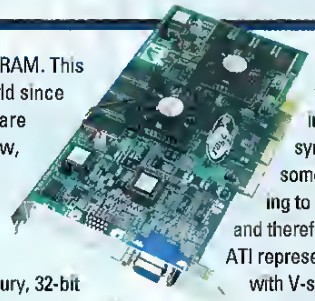
Go to www.pcgamer.com/request Product #910

ATI

Rage Fury MAXX

COMPANY
ATI,
(905) 882-2600,
www.ati.com

PRICE
$299 *(M.S.R.P.)*



The doubled "Xs" in the MAXX's name are there to highlight tha fact that two Raga 128 chips, the same ones used in the original Fury, driva this card. The dual chips work togethar using a tachnology called AFR, or Alternata Frame Randering. By way of AFR, each chip renders alternate frames without having to wait for the other chip, and the end result is an SLI-like performance increase over a single Rage 128.

While the MAXX's box hypes the fact that it is a 64MB card, the raality is that because of tha card's unique architecture -- with each chip having its own 32MB — the and result is that you're only using 32MB of total onboard RAM. This isn't the end of the world since evary other card out thare only has 32MB right now, but don't be fooled into thinking you're going to get true 64MB performance.

Like the original Fury, 32-bit rendaring is top-notch. Images are bright and vibrant, and rank right up there with those produced by cards like the GeForce and G400. In 16-bit, however, ATI is still having difficulties kaeping pace with the rest of the pack. The MAXX has some truly horrific alpha blending problems at this color depth. *QIII* takes the biggest beating when running in this mode, with certain transparent textures appearing to have an odd sparkling effect that we've only evar seen with the Rage 128.

The MAXX's performance is a mixed bag. It's faster than even the GeForce DDR in some instances in D3D, but in DpenGL, unless you've got a very fast CPU (we're talking 700MHz or so) it trails rather far behind. Also, while the frame rate is *much* improved by disabling V-sync, the two Rage 128s can sometimes get "confused" talking to each other in this mode, and therefore the card, according to ATI representatives, should only ba run with V-sync enablad if you want to avoid any strange artifacting (they also promise a fix in future driver revisions). In the meantime, though, it's hard to recommend the MAXX over the Annihilator Pro when they are both selling for the same price.

BENCH MARKS

3D MARK MAX
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)
16-bit color
4585 3D Merks @ 800x600
Geme 1 Rece: 49.5fps
Game 2 First Person: 42.4fps
Fill Rate with M/texturing:
179.8 (in Mega Texels)

32-bit color:
4568 3D Merks @ 800x600
Geme 1 Rece: 49.7fps
Game 2 First Person. 42.2fps
Fill Rate with M/texturing:
142.6 (in Mega Texels)

QUAKE III
(32-BIT COLOR, ALL EFFECTS SET AT MAX)
V-Sync disabled:
640x480. 45.2fps
800x600. 37.3fps
1024x768 28.3fps
1600x1200 6.5fps

V-Sync enabled:
640x480. 30.6fps
800x600. 23.7fps
1024x768. 17.8fps
1600x1200 8.1fps

V-Sync enabled.
640x480 30.6fps
800x600. 23.7fps
1024x768 17.8fps
1600x1200. 6.1fps

QUAKE II
(16-BIT COLOR)
V-Sync disabled
640x480. 45.2fps
800x600 37.3fps
1024x768 28.3fps
1600x1200: 6.5fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Great 32-bit rendering; very fast D3D

LOWS Poor 16-bit rendering; weak and buggy DpenGL support; two 32MB cards sometimes get "confused" when communicating with each other

BOTTOM LINE When the MAXX's drivers finally reach meturity, it may be worth a hard look. Until then, you might went to go for a DDR-based GeForce.

DIAMOND/S3

Viper II

COMPANY
Diamond/S3,
(800) 468-5846,
www.diamondmm.com

PRICE
$199 *(M.S.R.P.)*



Now that S3 has its teeth firmly buried in Diamond Multimedia's tender flesh, many video card lines like the Viper, once reserved for NVIDIA-based chips, ara seating S3 chips exclusivaly. Case in point — the new 32MB Viper II packs the power of S3's Savage 2000 controller chip.

Like every S3-based card since the Savage3D, the 2000's key feature is its support for S3TC (texture compression). And while we'd like to say that its hardware T&L engine was also an important feature, it's difficult to do that at this point since the feature is totally disabled by the shipping software drivers. According to representatives at Diamond, however, an upcoming driver revision should enable it.

Like the two other video cards reviewed this month, the Viper II renders some rather stunning 32-bit color images — albeit with some mildly bothersome texture dropout from time to time. We chalk this problem up to shaky drivers, and expect it, like the T&L issue, to be resolved in the near future — we hope.

Despite many flaws such as limited D3D tweaking options, zero OpenGL user adjustments, and the other driver related issues we've already mentioned, the Viper II still ends up being a fairly speedy card. In fact, it's faster in many games than the ATI Rage Fury MAXX, especially on slower to mid-range processors. All that, plus, it's a $100 less expensive.

As we're sure you can tell, the main thing keeping the Viper II from getting an Editors' Choice award is all these damned driver issues. While we might have been able to excuse any one of them individually, there's simply too many piled up together to recommend this card very highly. In fact, even though it can tend to be a bit slower at times, a big-name TNT2 Ultra is still a very viable option at this point if you are looking for a card without any driver flaws to speak of. Food for thought, anyway — at least until Diamond and S3 finish the Viper II's drivers in earnest.

BENCH MARKS

3D MARK MAX
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)
16-bit color - 800x600:
4123 3D Merks
Geme 1 Rece: 45.1fps
Gome 2 First Person: 38.6fps
Fill Rate with M/texturing:
451.3 (in Mega Texels)

32-bit color - 800x600:
4112 3D Merks
Geme 1 Rece: 45.1fps
Game 2 First Person: 37.8fps
Fill Rate with M/texturing:
353.8 (in Mega Texels)

16-bit color -1600x1200:
2493 3D Merks
Geme 1 Rece 23.9fps
Game 2 First Person: 17.5fps
Fill Rate with M/texturing:
478.1 (in Mege Texels)

16-bit color - 1600x1200:
1861 3D Merks
Geme 1 Rece 17.5fps
Game 2 First Person 19.9fps
Fill Rate with M/texturing:
358.2 (in Mega Texels)

QUAKE III
(32-BIT COLOR, ALL EFFECTS SET AT MAX)
640x480: 68.5fps
800x600 60.5fps
1024x768 43.4fps
1600x1200 19.3fps

QUAKE II
16-bit:
640x480: 104.8fps
800x600. 103.9fps
1024x768: 91.7fps
1600x1200 43.4fps

32-bit:
640x480 103.3fps
800x600. 101.2fps
1024x768: 77.3fps
1600x1200 9.4fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Very fast at lower to mid-range resolutions and actually yields a playable *QIII* frame rate at 1600x1200; excellent DVD playback.

LOWS Very buggy drivers across the board.

BOTTOM LINE A good choice for mid-range systems — if and when the drivers become stable and if SDR GeForce cards aren't less expensive by the time they are.

CREATIVE LABS

Annihilator Pro

PC GAMER EDITORS' CHOICE

With only a few short months on the scene, NVIDIA's GeForce 3D chip has already become the elder statesman of this newest generation of 3D accelerators. While cards like the ATI Rage Fury MAXX and Diamond Viper II can keep pece pretty well in certain situations, overall, the GeForce is still king — especially now that we have DDR.

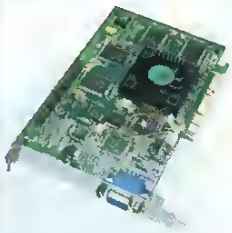
Back in our January 2000 issue, we reviewed the first two GeForce cards to hit the market: Creative's Annihilator and Guillemot's 3D Prophet. In that same article, we also told you about a RAM technology called DDR that would be making its way to a GeForce card near you very soon. That time is now.

In case you've forgotten, DDR stands for double-data rate, and whet it means is that unlike standard SDR memory that ships with every other video card out there, DDR can process two instructions at a time, thus making it effectively twice as fast as ordinary memory. So, even though Creative Labs has slowed the physical clock rate of the Pro's memory down from 166MHz on the Annihilator to 150MHz on the Pro, the real difference between the two is more like 166MHz versus 300MHz (150MHz X 2).

Interestingly, the differences between the SDR and DDR versions of the Annihilator don't really show themselves at low resolutions or in 16-bit color. No, the real excitement starts when you crank up to 32-bit color and begin piling on tons of effects — like in *Quake III: Arena*. With everything cranked to the max, the Pro spit out extremely impressive frame rates across the board. Does this mean you should rush out and buy a Pro if you've already got an SDR GeForce? Probably not, but if you've got an older card, or if you're building e new system and looking for the fastest, most powerful 3D card (with the best drivers, we might add) around, Creative's new Annihilator Pro is definitely the wey to go.

COMPANY
Creative Labs,
(800) 998-1000,
www creativelabs.com

PRICE
$299 *(M S.R.P.)*



BENCHMARKS

3D MARK MAX
(TESTS DIRECT3D PERFORMANCE)

16-bit color - 800x600:
4374 3D Marks
Game 1 Rece: 47 0fps
Game 2 First Person: 40.9fps
Fill Rate with M/texturieg:
421.7 (in Mega Texels)

32-bit color - 800x600:
3991 3D Marks
Game 1 Rece: 41.7fps
Game 2 First Person: 38.3fps
Fill Rate with M/texturieg:
353.8 (in Mega Texels)

16-bit color - 1600x1200
(CARD FAILED WITH AN OUT OF MEMORY WARNING AT 32 BIT)
2820 3D Marks
Game 1 Rece. 28.2fps
Game 2 First Person: 28 1fps
Fill Rate with M/texturieg:
452 5 (in Mega Texels)

QUAKE III
(32-BIT COLOR, ALL EFFECTS SET AT MAX)

640x480: 80.3fps
800x600: 71 4fps
1024x768: 50.3fps
1600x1200: 8.5fps

QUAKE II
(16-BIT COLOR)

16-bit:
640x480: 134.2fps
800x600: 131.8fps
1024x768: 119 8fps
1600x1200: 53.3fps

32-bit:
640x480: 134 1fps
800x600: 130 0fps
1024x768: 105 0fps
1600x1200: 43.8fps

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Everything the Annihilator is, only faster (in other words, it's all good).

LOWS Not cheap; not necessary if you've already got an SDR GeForce card.

BOTTOM LINE Creative Labs does it again. The Annihilator Pro gets our highest recommendation if you're looking for a fast, powerful 3D card (at least until something better comes along).



KARNA PRECISION

Razer BoomSlang

COMPANY
Karna Precision,
www.razerzone.com,
(877) RAZERZONE

PRICE
$69 *(M.S.R.P. FOR 1000)*
$99 *(M.S.R.P. FOR 2000)*

OTHER OPTIONS

A good, run-of-the-mill Microsoft or Logitech mouse is still A-Okay as far as we're concerned, and a Microsoft mouse with IntelliEye technology is even better. And, if you're looking for something really different, consider taking a look at trackball mice from Logitech and Kensington.

The Razer BoomSlang is a mouse geared specifically for gaming. It takes advantage of Karna Precision Technology, which uses a focused light to count mouse ball rotations. The end result is that the Razer BoomSlang is one very accurate mouse — or should we say "mice," since it ships in two different flavors, the 1000 and the 2000. The 1000 has a resolution of 1000dpi (dots per inch) and the 2000 has (you guessed it) 2000dpi for increased onscreen precision. By comparison, the mouse you use right now likely runs at around 450dpi.



Because of the BoomSlang's higher dpi ratings, these mice seem faster and more accurate when playing many types of games — most notably, first-person shooters. Aside from being one of the "driving" forces (pardon the pun) behind the BoomSlang's speed and high resolutions, the software it comes with makes just about every feature of these high-tech mice adjustable. From the mouse and scroll-wheel sensitivity to the button layout, to being able to configure the mice to work if you're a lefty or a righty, the software is definitely robust.

But how do these mice handle, you ask? In a word, smooth. In fact, they are the smoothest, most precise mice we've ever used — regardless of whether we were using them in PS/2 or USB modes since Karna's software is able to bump up the PS/2's, ordinarily slow polling rate. Sensitivity aside, however, the two extra buttons on the sides of the BoomSlang are a little cumbersome. It's very easy to press them accidentally since they're located right where your thumb and pinky rest naturally. Also, the mouse ball is situated toward the back-end of the mouse instead of the middle as with most mice. As a result, when we used the BoomSlang on several different mousing surfaces, the mouse ball often lost contact with the pad when we pulled the mouse toward us. This led to more than a few missed shots with the sniper rifle in *Unreal Tournament*. Also, the Razer BoomSlang is a big mouse, so if you've got small hands, you may be in trouble.

While the BoomSlang isn't the world's most comfortable mouse, and it isn't even the most practical mouse, it is the smoothest, most accurate mouse we've ever used. If that's your primary concern, then give the BoomSlang line a look.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Smoothest, most accurate mouse money can buy; looks really cool.

LOWS Hard to get used to initially; ball placed in odd position; buttons can be too sensitive; big.

BOTTOM LINE Inspired, but not perfect, mouse: if what you want is precision above all else, then the BoomSlang could be right for you.

ALTEC LANSING

ADA880

COMPANY
Altec Lansing,
(800) ALTEC-88,
www.alteclansing.com

PRICE
$299 *(M.S.R.P.)*

OTHER OPTIONS

We're beginning to sound like a broken record here, but if you are willing to shell out the money, Klipsch offers the best set of speakers that money can buy. They'll run you about $249.99, but they're worth every penny. Check them out at *www.klipsch.com*.

We first heard Altec's new ADA880s at Comdex late last year, and at the time, they sounded very good indeed. Of course, we were listening to them in a very frantic, noisy environment, so any real evaluation had to wait until we finally got a set into our office. Now that we have, we're not quite as impressed as we were at the show.



For starters, while the 880s come with four speakers, they aren't like the four-way speakers you're probably accustomed to. The two rears are used in games or movies that use either Dolby ProLogic or Dolby Digital (if you're connecting via a S/PDIF cable); the rest of the time, like when you're just listening to music or playing a game, they're simply inactive unless you "force" Dolby ProLogic mode with the press of a button. Once you do this, however, the resulting sound quality drops into the toilet, as presence falls away and all you're left with is a very wet, very saturated reverb effect that just sounds — and we're being kind here — poor.

These speakers are far from a total loss, though, when they're setup in two-way mode (accomplished by stacking the rear speakers atop the fronts via a rather ingenious connections scheme). Or, if you simply don't use the rears for anything at all, the two-speaker output from the ADA880s is rather nice. The subwoofer, while only pumping 40 watts (the satellites split another 40 for a total of 80 watts RMS for the entire system), still manages to thump along pretty well. Heck, the setup even comes with a wireless remote control for making adjustments while you're away from your desk. Unfortunately, we found ourselves using the remote as our primary way of adjusting these speakers because the knob on the right front satellite that is used to tweak everything from the volume to the bass and treble settings is extremely stiff.

At $299, there's just no way we can recommend the ADA880s over Klipsch's $249.99, THX certified, 400 watt v.2-400s — even with Altec's fancy remote control. Keep an ear out, though, as Altec is about to release a set of THX-certified speakers of its own. We'll keep you posted.

FINAL VERDICT

HIGHS Good two-speaker output; remote control is cool.

LOWS Doesn't deliver true four-way speakers in all situations; overpriced for what you get.

BOTTOM LINE If the ADA880s were $100 less, they'd be worth a look, but at this price point, we can't recommend them over the competition.

ALIENWARE

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Microsoft Sidewinder Precision Pro
Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad
Microsoft Windows '98 SE OS
Free installation & configuration of
favorite games & optimal drivers

PRICE: $3,399.00
Financing starting at: $84.00/Mo. 60 Mos.

AREA 51

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Intel i820 Chipset Motherboard w/6 PCI Slots
RDRAM 128MB (PC-800)
Floppy Drive 1.44MB
IBM Deskstar 34GXP 22GB 7200RPM Hard Drive
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Aureal Vortex II Super-Quad Sound Card
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Black 107-Enhanced Keyboard PS/2
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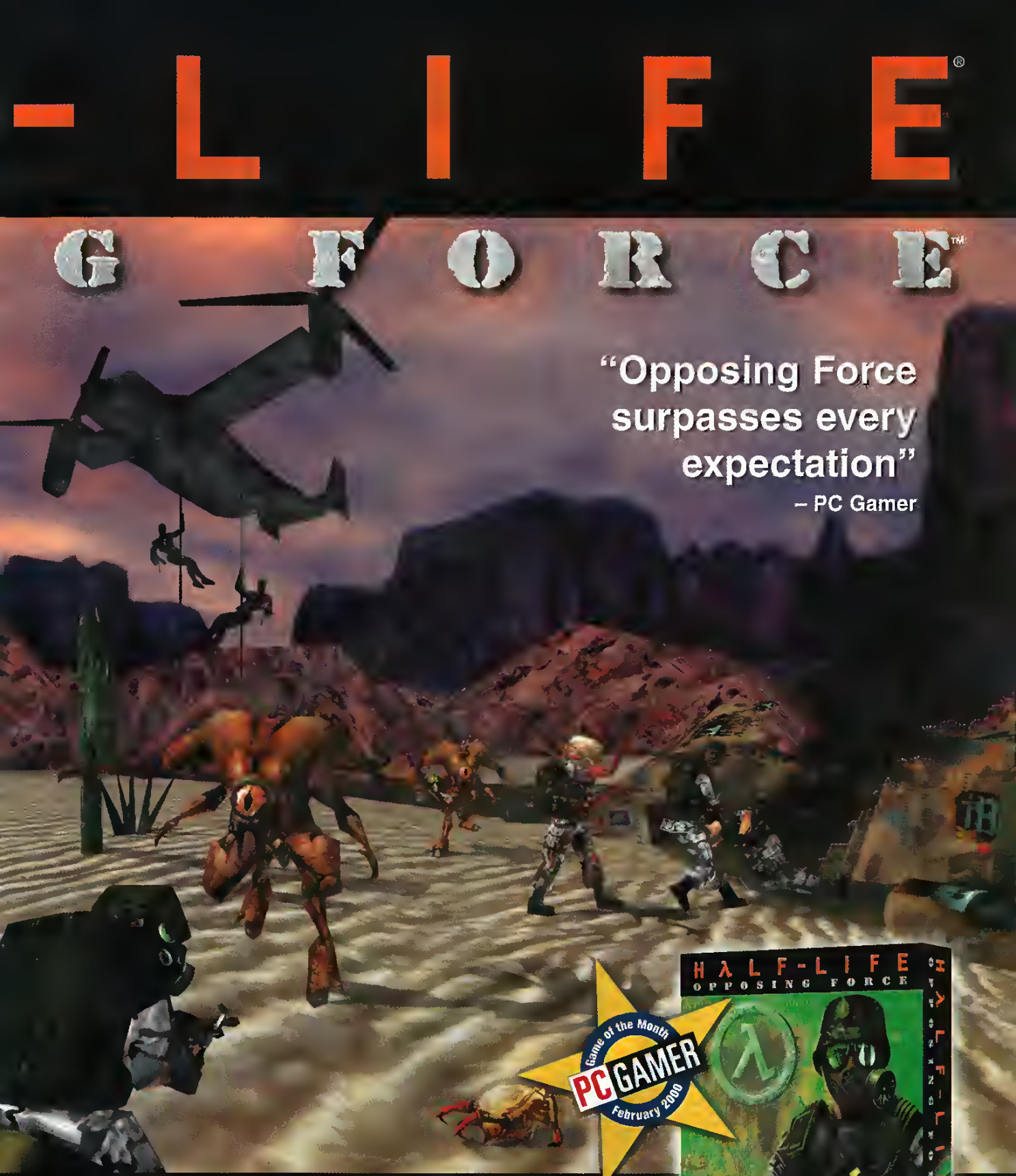
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IBM	Kingston	**Crucial**
Aptiva (2153) Model E2U	$154.00	$94.49
Aptiva (2139) Model E5D	$154.00	$94.49
HP	Kingston	**Crucial**
Pavilion 4530	$186.00	$94.49
Pavilion 4535	$186.00	$94.49
Kayak XU PC Workstation 440BX Chipset	$207.00	$106.19
Vectra VL Series 8	$154.00	$94.49
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Power Mac G3 PC100	$154.00	$94.49
Power Mac G4	$168.00	$94.49

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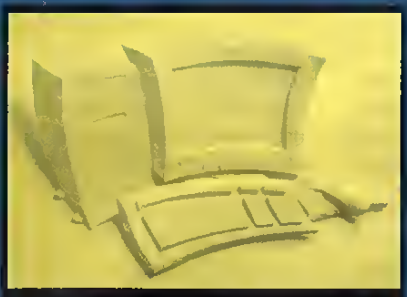
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The memory experts.

Everybody wants a fast gaming computer, but what are you supposed to do if money is tight — or, on the flip side, if you've got money to burn? Are you supposed to go to your local computer super store and buy, of all things, a retail machine? Heck no! Each month the Trinity Page will list the parts we recommend for low, mid, and high-end budgets. Most of the prices printed here are from various Internet resellers, and at press time, are the best deals around. Depending on when and where you shop, you may find these items for a bit more, or, if you're lucky, a bit less.

WELCOME TO A BRAVE NEW WORLD



ENTRY-LEVEL SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY $999

CASE. Addtronics 6890A $100
PROCESSOR: Intel Celeron 500MHz PPGA $120
MOTHERBOARD: A-Bit BE6 $106
MEMORY: 64MB PC-100 SDRAM $55
PPGA (SOCKET 370) CONVERTER: AB-RS370 $15
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Hi-Val 6X Pioneer DVD-ROM drive w/software DVD decoding . . $115
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB $8
HARD DRIVE: 6.4GB Seagate ST36421A $86
SOUND CARD: Creative SBLive! Value . . . $39
MODEM: Diamond SupraMax 56k PCI $18
MONITOR: 17" Optiquest Q71 $175
VIDEO CARD: 3dfx Voodoo3 3000 $107
JOYSTICK: Logitech WingMan Digital $17
GAMEPAD: The original Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad $23
SPEAKERS: Labtech LCS-2414 $35
KEYBOARD: Addtronics $15
USB MOUSE: Logitech or Microsoft $39
TOTAL: $1,073



MID-RANGE SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY $1,800

CASE. Addtronics 6890A $100
PROCESSOR: Intel Pentium III 600MHz . . $419
or AMD Athlon 600MHz $361
MOTHERBOARD: For PIII: A-Bit BE6 . . $106
For Athlon: MicroStar 6167 $129
MEMORY: 128MB PC-100 SDRAM $127
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Creative Encore 6x with Dxr3 $141
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB $8
HARD DRIVE: 13.5GB IBM Deskstar 7200rpm Ultra 66 EIDE $130
SOUND CARD: CL SBLive! MP3+ $69
MODEM: Diamond SupraMax 56k PCI . . . $18
MONITOR: 19" Optiquest V95 $338
VIDEO CARD: Creative Labs 3D Blaster TNT2 Ultra $148
JOYSTICK: Microsoft Sidewinder Precision Pro $53
GAMEPAD: The original Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad $23
SPEAKERS: Cambridge SoundWorks FPS 1000 $70
KEYBOARD: Addtronics $15
USB MOUSE: Logitech or Microsoft USB . . $39
TOTALS: Intel PIII-based: $1,804
AMD Athlon-based: $1,769



HIGH-END SYSTEM

PRICE: ROUGHLY $3,000 AND UP

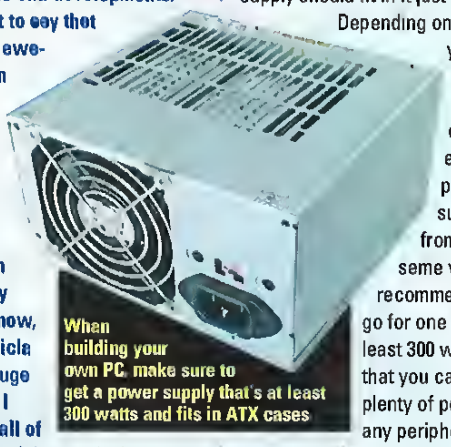
CASE: Addtronics 6890A $100
PROCESSOR: Intel Coppermine 733MHz . . $763
or AMD Athlon 750MHz $794
MOTHERBOARD: For Intel: Intel CC820 . . $119
For Athlon: MicroStar 6167 $129
MEMORY: 256MB PC-100 SDRAM $283
CD-ROM/DVD-ROM: Pioneer HDVD10AS-00R1 10X DVD-ROM with MPG2 card $259
FLOPPY DRIVE: Samsung 3.5" 1.44MB . . . $8
HARD DRIVE: 22GXP IBM Deskstar 7200rpm Ultra 66 EIDE $222
SOUND CARD: CL SBLive! MP3+ $69
MODEM: 3COM #5685 56K v.90 $85
MONITOR: 19" Optiquest V95 $338
VIDEO CARD: NVIDIA GeForce 256-based card with DDR RAM $269
ADD-ON 3D: 12MB 3dfx Voodoo2 $70
JOYSTICK: Saitek X36 Flight Control System $96
GAMEPAD: The original Microsoft Sidewinder Gamepad $23
SPEAKERS: Klipsch ProMedia v.2-400 . . . $249
KEYBOARD: Microsoft Natural Pro $75
USB MOUSE: Original IntelliMouse with IntelliEye technology $55
TOTALS: Intel PIII-based: $2,983
AMD Athlon-based: $3,024

Slot 1? Slot A? What on Earth are you talking about?

Dear Greg is still popular with the young people, so Greg answered one personal question for you this month. But be warned — if you're not a fan of Rocco Siffredi, you may want to skip this one. Greg also tackles some sticky motherboard issues and gets high praise from a reader. Keep those suck-up letters coming!

Q First of all, I need to compliment you on the great job you're doing at *PC Gamer*. The Hard Stuff is an excellent resource that always keeps me on top of the latest technical issues and developments. I also want to say that you did an awesome job in the article you did about building your own PC. I'm working on building my own right now, and the article will be a huge help when I finally get all of the parts in. *(I have a feeling our Dear Greg may be embellishing these letters on occasion — Ed.)* My question for you has to do with the article, though. I used it and your Trinity page as a basis for buying the parts for my computer. You don't ever mention anything about a power supply in your article or in the Trinity page, so I ordered a case from Addtronics, a 6890A — just the case, with no power supply. I figured it came with the motherboard, and it apparently didn't, as there isn't one with it. So do I need to order a power supply from Addtronics? If so, which one? This is the only part of the computer I haven't figured out yet, so any help you could offer would be much appreciated. Thanks, and again, congrats on a great job!

—DAMIEN GROSSER, VIA THE INTERNET



When building your own PC, make sure to get a power supply that's at least 300 watts and fits in ATX cases

A D'oh! Sorry about that one, Damien. I certainly didn't mean to lead you astray! Luckily, the Addtronics 6890A is a standard ATX-type case, and any standard ATX power supply should fit in it just fine.

Depending on where you got your case, you can probably get a power supply from the same vendor. I recommend you go for one with at least 300 watts so that you can have plenty of power for any peripherals and cards you might add to your computer down the road.

Q I wanted to know if AMD's Athlon chips work on Slot 1 motherboards, or would I have to purchase a different motherboard specifically for the Athlon? Physically, PIIs and Athlons look to be almost identical, as do the slots on the different motherboards, so I was hoping to just swap chips.

—TOMASZ CZERECHOWICZ, VIA THE INTERNET

A Unfortunately, you can't, Tom. While the two chips look the same, they are electronically different and each requires its own type of slot. If you want an Athlon processor, you're going to need to get a motherboard that was made to work with it.

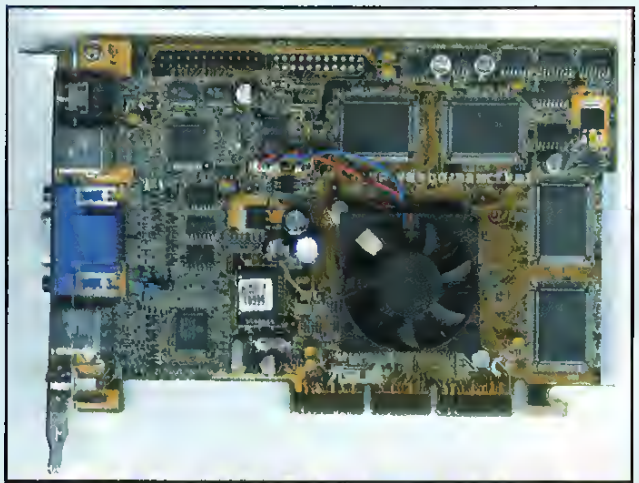
Q I recently purchased a GeForce-based Asus V6600. I want for the deluxe model because of its video ins and outs, but now I'm having problems. While the card works fine under normal conditions (playing games on my PC monitor), the instant I plug in the S-Video cable, I get an error message saying "divided by 0," then a message from Asus pops up and says that I'm not getting a steady 3.3 volts from my motherboard. As soon as I remove the cable, the card starts functioning again.

I currently have an OZZ0 PIIBXB motherboard with a 350MHz PII processor. I have four PCI slots and none are filled. There are no hardware conflicts with any devices. I called Asus and because of language issues, I could barely understand the person on the other end of the phone and got no help whatsoever as a result. Is there anything I can do about this, or am I stuck needing to get a new motherboard? I was thinking of upgrading to an Athlon-based system before this happened, anyway, but when I called Asus they said they didn't recommend Athlon motherboards for use with their V6600 card. What's up with that?

—TODD ADAMS, VIA THE INTERNET

A Yes, it sounds like your existing motherboard isn't pumping out enough juice. Unfortunately, it's a fairly common problem, and we've dealt with it in the past here at the Hard Stuff. Generally speaking, motherboards by large manufacturers like Intel, Asus, A-Bit, etc., don't suffer from power issues like you've described. If you go for an Intel-based motherboard again, make certain you know ahead of time whether or not the board is putting out a true 3.3 volts. When it comes to in-depth motherboard info, good sites to check out on the web are *www.sharkyextreme.com* and *www.tomshardware.com*. Both sites have writers that are aware of the AGP power issues, and are sure to mention any problems in their motherboard reviews.

As for whether or not you can put a GeForce in an Athlon system, well, regardless of what Asus is telling you, you should be



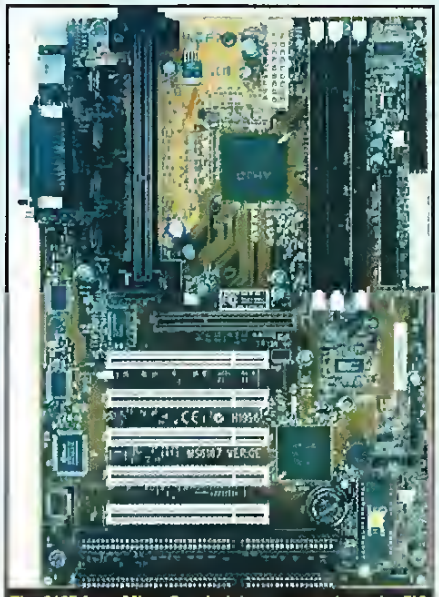
You should be able to put a GeForce card in an Athlon system as long as you have a decent motherboard. Check out the web for in-depth motherboard info.

able to put one in — as long as you've got a decent motherboard (though you'll only get AGP 2X). This month, we've changed our recommended Athlon motherboard from the FIC SD-11 to the MSI 6167, which we've found to be a superior boerd overall. Go for this motherboard, and everything should be just fine when using the Asus GeForce.

Q **I've beaa going mad tryiag to find out if PC-133 (133MHz) SDRAM runs with the latel Coppermiae motherboard cc820. The latel wabsite says it doesa't aeed it, bat everyoae else saams to be asing it anyway (e.g. Alieawara). Can you explain to me why this faster memory would or woalda't raa oa the cc820?**

—ALEXANDER SINOYANNIS, VIA THE INTERNET

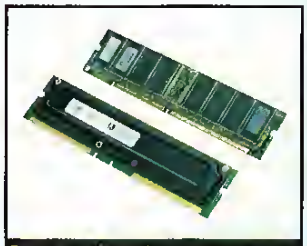
A We called Alienware and asked just that very same question. According to representatives there, the reeson they tend to use PC-133 with this boerd is two-fold: A) it's generally better memory overall, and B) They buy PC-133 memory in such bulk these days, that it's sometimes just about as inexpensive to put it in as PC-100 memory. As a rule, however, there doesn't seem to be much speed difference between the two RAM types whan used with motherboards like Intel's cc820 thet use what's called a "memory hub" to run SDRAM on a board/chipset that was designed to run RAMBUS memory. RAMBUS-type memory, while enabling impressively higher performance in Coppermine systems, costs as much as $7 or $8 a MB right now. And when you're talking about games today recommending as much as 128MB of RAM or more, that gets mighty pricey mighty quick!



The 6167 from MicroStar Intl. is a step up from the FIC SD11 we were recommending on the Trinity Page.

RAMBUS didn't taka off es fast es wes projected, and so at the last minute Intel came up with a way of making i820-based motherboerds function with standerd SDRAM. This solution is celled a memory translator hub, and while you cen now use good old fashioned PC-100 DIMMs in i820 motherboards like the Intel CC820, performance lags far behind systems that use RDRAM instead. The question is, are the RAMBUS-based systems fester because they aren't dealing with a memory translator hub or because RAMBUS really is that much faster? That question still hasn't been answered to my satisfaction — not in real-world benchmarks, anyway. Also, as I mentioned in my previous answer, current RDRAM prices are sky-high.

As for AMD's use of RAMBUS, right now, you're out of luck because the struggling semiconductor company isn't quite sure it wants to go down thet road as of yet. In time, however, that may change. We'll keep you updated.



For comparison, the bottom module is RDRAM and the top is SDRAM.

Q **I have a question regarding RDRAM, otherwise kaowa as RAMBUS. Is this type of RAM faster than standard PC-133? Do I aeed a special kiad of motherboard to use it? My plaa was to put en Athlon 650MHz or 750MHz as the heart of my next system, aad I jast weated to kaow if RAMBUS woald be makiag an appearaace ia AMD's sida of the feaca.**

—MATT OELORIE, VIA THE INTERNET

A Well, the issue of RAMBUS' true speed is in some question right now. Currently it only works in Intel i820 and i840-based motherboards. Due to some early production problems,

DEAR GREG

Q **While I traly appreciate yoar techaical help, the insider iafo we readers raceiva aboat the latest hardwara ia tha making, aad all the other professioaally writtea pieces ia tha Hard Stuff, I woald like to voice my protast in regards to yoar persoaal writiags. My brother aad I fiad Daar Greg hilarioas at times, bat I was very apset at your advice to the kid about his parents' divorce, whera you tried to find humor in a terrible sitaatioa. Thea, recently ia yoar Febraary 2000 editorial, yoa wrote aboat porn.**

Look, I know aftar readiag *PC Accelerator* that yoa PC game lovers thoroaghly eajoy viewing woman withoat their clothas oa aad farther aajoy lattiag yoar last control you, but guess what? That's parsonal iaformatioa, aad I coald've goae oa thinking you were a great gay had you not spoiled it by talkiag about Las Vegas' free pora. So, here's a little tip: If you want more people to like yoa, leave out the porn. You'll also receive far less demands for your best pora pictures that I'm certaia are cloggiag up your E-mail from othar addicts who have foaad a commoa iatarest with their *PC Gamar* hardware aditor. And here's aaother tip for yoa: Get off the porn! It will make yoar life bettar, I promise.

—TIM GERNANO, VIA THE INTERNET



Rocco Siffreddi: Gettin' it done again

A So the other day I was watching a little film celled *Rocco Gets it Done 6*, when all of a sudden these two women came into Rocco's living room wearing this really sexy little two-piece number. Yeah, you read that right, they were wearing one little two-piece number — one was wearing the top and the other was wearing the bottom. And let me tell you something, when Rocco got a hold of them...woo-wee boy! That guy is just too much man for a lot of the starlets out there to handle these days. He gets that tongue working (not to mention his magic fingers) and there's nothing for those poor women to do but pass out from sheer exhaustion. Really, I feel bad for some of them. See, so I must be a pretty nice guy, right? Right? Hello?

NEED HELP?

If you have a hardware question or comment, or a personal problem, write to:
Greg Vederman,
Hard Stuff, PC Gamer,
150 North Hill Drive,
Brisbane, CA 94005

or E-mail:
gvederman@pcgamer.com



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T. LIAM MCDONALD



EXTENDED PLAY

ADD-ONS | SCENARIO DISCS | UPGRADES | BUG PATCHES

Mooning Pirates

Tom gets back in the *MechWarrior* saddle with a prolific new add-on pack and digs his heels into some tough new *Operational Art of War* campaigns.

MechWarrior 3: Pirate's Moon is a thoroughly conventional but nevertheless satisfying set of new missions for last year's most thoroughly conventional mech sequel. *Heavy Gear II* may have offered some more interesting twists on the genre, but *MW3* is a slick and satisfying experience, and there's little cause for complaint about *Pirate's Moon*.

Apparently, the brass wasn't all that impressed with your heroics at the end of the original campaign, so they stuck your ass on a godforsaken rock in the middle of nowhere to sit on guard duty. You won't sit for long; the campaign chucks you right into the deep end, assuming that you just finished the original campaign about five minutes before and still have all your skills sharpened. I didn't, having finished and deleted the original a couple months ago. Thus, the first mission was a real nutcruncher. Sent out on a routine escort mission, you encounter a heavy and a scout who is more bothersome than he should be. Then, you have to break off and fall back rapidly to protect your base from a couple mediums. This means you have to finish the primary quickly *and* get to the base defense immediately. Either one is easy to fail, and this is just the first mission.

Tom's new Arbitrary Rule for Computer Game Design #534: the first mission of an add-on disc shouldn't be as hard as the last mission of the original.

Despite this steep curve, the missions are very good, albeit a little busy. Something nasty is always happening to yank you away from a primary. The cause of this frenzied atmosphere is a band of mechwarrior pirates who toss you off the very rock you were sent to protect. The 20-mission campaign includes full salvage rules, a pretty decent mission structure, and good color and narrative commentary in-cockpit and during briefings. Slightly modified versions of these missions can also be played as the pirates, but these don't use standard campaign rules and don't have salvage.

The new missions, along with multiplay and quick start, take place on four new maps: Canyon's Edge, Road to Madre, Desolation Ridge, and Madre Crater. These have some interesting geological features and make for good strategic exercises, but the AI doesn't seem to deal with them all that well, at least not in instant action mode — more than one opponent walked right into a crater and melted himself. These new maps are effec-





The mechanized goodness keeps on coming, making sure that fans of FASA's MechWarrior universe won't have to sully themselves with some FPS title.

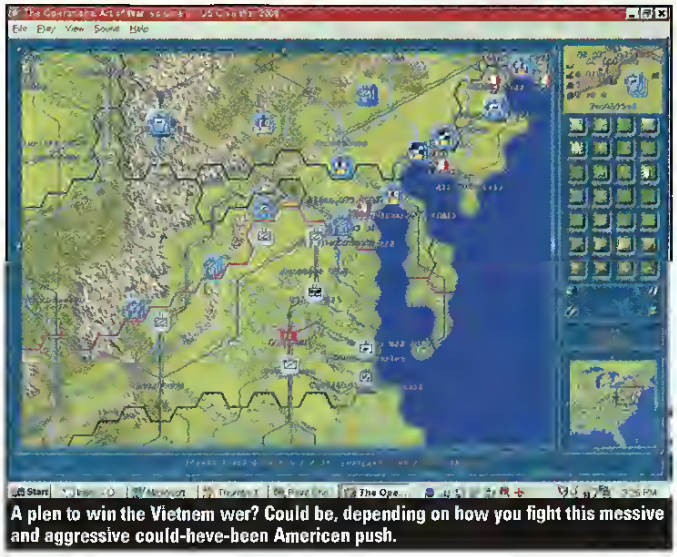
www.DailyRadar.com

tively tailored for the new base attack multiplay mode. It can be played team or solo, from either side, and with one base (one side attacks, the other defends) or two (each side has its own base). It's a good addition to the *Mech* canon.

Multiplay sessions can also be set for multiple rounds. In between each round, the winners are given salvage points to upgrade their gear. I haven't spent quite enough time with this to see if longer sessions get radically unbalanced, but the couple rounds I tried seemed to parse out points fairly. One minor problem with the multiplayer element is the size of the maps, which are a touch spacious, resulting in occasional lengthy transit times.

> These missions have some interesting geological features and make for good strategic exercises...it's a good addition to the *Mech* canon.

The seven new mechs are mostly standard mech fare, with the only really interesting addition being the Elemental. Remember those annoying little buggers that looked like something out of *Tribes*? Well, you can now play as one, which adds some interesting possibilities, such as swarms of Elementals against one assault mech. The other six new chassis include three heavies (among them the outstanding Masakari), two mediums, and a scout. The selection of new weapons are mostly variations on familiar types such as lasers, machine guns, missiles (including a single warhead with a 15D-meter range and the power of a full LRM salvo), and the gauss. No surprises, but welcome for the fans, which pretty much sums up the whole package and indeed the original game.



A plen to win the Vietnem wer? Could be, depending on how you fight this messive and aggressive could-heve-been Americen push.

Mud and Blood

Talonsoft has given us the first add-on for Norm Koger's masterpiece *The Operational Art of War Volume II: Flashpoint Kosovo*. The new offerings are: Vietnam Invasion '69, NATO-Warsaw Pact '78, Grenada '83, Kuwait '91, Yugoslavia '99 (Kosovo), Hungary-Romania 2000, Libya-Egypt 2000, Russo-China 2000, Seoul 2000, Bulge 2000, and U.S. Civil War 2008. The unit database has also been overhauled for greater accuracy, including a more detailed modeling of armor. Almost all of these new maps are in the 100-turn category, making them absolutely huge affairs that can easily consume 40 hours each. The painstaking detail in creating orders of battle (including hypotheticals), maps, and balanced scenarios is truly amazing. Any one of the large-scale battles could stand alone as its own game.

Talonsoft also closes the door on *OpWar 1* with *The Operational Art of War, Volume I: Wargame of the Year Edition*: a bundle including the game, *Battle Pack 1*, and a number of new scenarios exclusive to this edition.

PCG



"The south will rise again," a popular chestnut for armchair generals, gets the royal treatment in this 90-turn monster scenario for *Operational Art of War II*.

BUG PATCHES

Always read the README.TXT file included with petches for en exhaustive list of chenges!

***AGE OF WONDERS* v1.2** (G.D.D.) Massive patch! AI in both World and Tactical modes has been enhanced, world AI is more likely to make alliances with players it is at Peace with, Lord AI Heroes now get +3 EXP/day, instead of the previous +5 EXP/day, faster network play, 2 additional AI levels *AOWV1_2.ZIP*



UNREAL TOURNAMENT

***AGE OF EMPIRES II* AI** (Microsoft) Computer player is no longer prone to resign after a few minutes of play *AGE2CPFIX.EXE*

***DESCENT 3* v1.3** (Interplay) Numerous fixes and additions including significant memory savings, added ability for objects to cast "negative" light, fixed randomness in ambient sound patterns, new command line options added for further customization *D3_US_1.3_PATCH.EXE*

***DRIVER* v2.0** (GT Interactive) Changes include a new control to switch between analog and digital control pads, added a user-definable dead zone amount, keys now function when in joystick control, analog steering has much more range than before. **NOTE:** This patch will cause existing recorded replays that use joystick control to no longer work *DRIVERUSPATCHV2.EXE*

RE-VOLT (Acclaim) Ability to disable the Museum 2 stars that caused problems with some 3D cards, ability to disable force feedback, and 3D sound support for Aureal A3D 1.0, DirectSound 3D and DirectSound3D with EAX 2.0 *REVOLT-PATCH1207.ZIP*

***COMMANDO & CONQUER: TIBERIAN SUN* v1.17** (Westwood) Not much is known about the effects of this patch beyond the description on the Westwood web site stating that it provides "even faster gameplay well as other new features." Sounds good to us. *TS117EN.ZIP*

***UNREAL TOURNAMENT* 402** (GT Interactive) Another very substantial patch. Changes include fixed D3D detection, fixed NT crash on exit, suicide can now end overtime of a tied game, turn fog off by default for D3D, fixed CTF alternate path problem, fixed bots not always playing take hit sounds, players can no longer switch to illegal team if server is full and force team balance, don't kill spectators in the pressure chamber, numerous server performance improvements. *UTPATCH402.EXE*

***FREESPACE 2* v1.02** (Interplay) Changes include a Glide texture stretching fix, stand-alone server CD checking fix, pilot's score added to multiplayer debriefing, technical database does not show duplicates of each weapon, intro movie no longer shows up twice in cutscene player after campaign, wingmen now receive a score bonus when large ships are destroyed, mission 3-4 conversation added *SF21X-12.EXE*

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DAN MORRIS AND MICHAEL "SANDMOOSE" LUTON

MULTIPLAY

NETWORK MODEM HEAD-TO-HEAD ONLINE GAMING

Did Unreal Survive the Quake?

There are two prime suspects for Multiplayer Game of the Year. Our detectives nab the guilty parties, rough them up a bit, and violate their civil rights.

DM: So whodunit...*Quake III* or *Unreal Tournament*?

ML: You're not actually trying to provoke a riot, are you? Civil unrest is at an all-time high, and you want to ask this question? Oh well, I guess that's what we have these night sticks for. Might as well get some use out of them. After playing both of these games all the way through, I can say beyond the shadow of a doubt that *damn*, you need a buttload of RAM to really enjoy either one. But when you get down to brass tacks, it's obvious that *Unreal Tournament* trumps *Quake III* in almost every way possible.

DM: Ah, just like Seattle. Remember Seattle? Heh! I got to cave some friggin' heads in outside that World Trade Organization rally. Hee hee. But yeah, I initially got so absorbed with *Quake III* that I couldn't even make time for *Unreal Tournament*. The brilliance of the deathmatching (and, I must say, the CTF) seemed tough to beat. But once I gave *UT* its fair shake, I became a convert as I saw how deep and team-oriented it was. The Assault mode is unbelievably fun.

ML: The Assault levels were by far my favorites, especially the D-Day beach invasion mission. For the first time in a long time, I stood in awe of a level design for a first-person shooter. *Quake III* had some great levels too, but I could never quite shake that feeling of deja vu — like I've basically seen most of those levels before. But what about the single-player bot AI? While the bots in *Quake III* are light years ahead of *Quake II*, they still disappoint in the face of the competition. The bots in *Unreal Tournament* are the most human-like I've ever seen. I was especially impressed with how they functioned in CTF mode. I would assign two or three bots to guard my flag and they would go out and first gather weapons appropriate for flag guarding and then find the best sniping spots. They even seemed to know where the choke points were and would try to cover those in their fields of fire. Brilliant!



Here's teamwork in action on the shores of Normandy beach. Clear those murder-holes!

DM: But we should still probably give *QIII* its propers. The curved surfaces, reflective light tricks, and ghostly transparency effects are awful nice. I think the essential problem with *Quake III* (as with its forebears) is that it's principally an *engine* first and a *game* second. It's almost as if id Software finds itself compelled to add a game around a mind-bogglingly grand new game engine. The real achievements, as with *Half-Life*, will be the games that use the *QIII* skeleton to form great new games from the engine. *UT* is the winner because it accomplished both tasks — a powerhouse engine with a fully realized game.

ML: Propers? What kind of word is that? You're just making stuff up now. But you're right about *Quake III*. Despite the edge that *Unreal Tournament* has over it, it's still a great game and a lot of fun to play. It would have been nice to have had more wild curved and reflective surfaces (like those in the screenshots we first showed) but I understand the performance penalty was just too high to pay. I also have to admire the sheer variety of *Quake III*'s cast of characters. There's a player model to suit just about everyone's personality. I like to play as the giant eyeball myself. Here in the squadroom, people have been talking about the "feel" of the two games and how *Quake III* feels more solid than *Unreal Tournament*, if that means anything.

DM: You're definitely right about the model variety. This extends even to the individualized sound libraries. I love the alien squeal Orbb lets out when he gets croaked. As far as "feel" is concerned, I think this is what people mean: the environments in *QIII* feel like they've got a harder edge and darker ambience, and it's easier to get into. I was first a little suspicious about *UT* because it has that glowy, gleamy look that doesn't immediately scream "hardcore first-person shooter." *QIII* looks like action in the bowels of a future-tech hell, and it's awesome. Granted, I ultimately came to like *UT*'s bigger, more complex levels more than *QIII*'s, but the feel is certainly different and a matter of preference. I think where *UT* really tap dances all over *QIII* is with the weapons, and their uses in combat.

ML: Ah, the weapons! This was one of the biggest criticisms with the original *Unreal*. The weapons were just too weak and ineffectual. With *UT*, however, they've been beefed up and tweaked into one of the most powerful and balanced set of weapons available today. With the exception of the pistol and bio-rifle, you can get kills equally as well with the entire line of weapons so you can use what suits your playing style instead of running for the rocket launcher all of the time. The alternate fire mode for the pulse gun is my personal favorite — just one continuous stream of lethal green stuff. And when it comes to close-quarters battle, the Flak Cannon more than gets the job done.

DM: All right, we have our man, then. Too bad this town just ain't big enough for the both of them. PCG

ROB SMOLKA



THE POINT AFTER

BASEBALL | BASKETBALL | FOOTBALL | HOCKEY | GOLF | SOCCER | ETC.

Leave Me Alone!

The antisocial and curmudgeonly Smoke makes a plea for developers to improve the single-player aspect in sports games instead of focusing only on multiplayer elements.

I hate multiplayer games! All right, maybe that's a bit harsh — I do get a kick out of going up against a fellow gamer with bragging rights on the line from time to time. What's got my shorts in a bunch is the gaming industry's growing fascination with all things online. It seems like every day we hear about another company that's looking to milk the supposed cash cow of Internet gaming. What scares me is that solo play will soon become an "added" feature, much the same way multiplayer options were viewed not too many years ago.

When you think about it from a design standpoint, making a multiplayer-only sports game is like having a free ride. With the polygon-pushing power of today's computers, making an attractive game is not nearly the chore it once was. What makes or breaks a sports title almost always comes down to artificial intelligence and how to make a number-crunching computer simulate real people. It's actually quite easy to create a game that can defeat even the best players — the challenge is to balance the CPU's abilities to make it feel "human."

The good news is that this year's crop of sports games have made major strides in accomplishing this delicate balance. No, none of them are perfect, and it will probably be a long while before any game's AI can truly approach the unpredictability of a human opponent, but that's not the point. Even a fairly convincing computer opponent allows me to play when I want, for as long as I want, without having to deal with the baggage that comes with playing against another person, and I'd hate to lose that.

I'm about as well-equipped as you can be for online gaming. I have a pretty fast computer both at home and at work, and my Internet connection is solid and speedy, so it's not a matter of performance (at least from my side). What turns me off to online gaming is — in a word — nuttiness.

It's no secret that the Internet is a haven for the unwashed, socially challenged masses, yearning to annoy. I can't tell you the number of times I've logged on to play a game, only to find my opponent with barely enough functioning brain cells to qualify as a human being, or who's so insecure that as soon as he starts losing, his connection "accidentally" terminates. There's nothing more frustrating than playing against a sore loser.

> It's no secret that the Internet is a haven for the unwashed, socially challenged masses, yearning to annoy.

On the other hand, there are always a few players who'll devote their lives to mastering a particular game, taking extreme pleasure in humiliating you. Going up against one of these experts is like beating your head against a wall — and they're not shy about telling you how much you suck. Actually, I take back what I said before, there *is* something more frustrating than a sore loser, and that's a gloating winner.

I'm not saying that you'll run into these types of players consistently, but it happens often enough to discourage me from even attempting to find a game most of the time. Time is also a factor. A common misconception about people who work for gaming magazines is that we play games all day — oh, if only that were the case. Putting together a monthly magazine takes a fair amount of work, and having a life outside of the office requires more than a little time management. So when an hour or two of gaming time opens up, the last thing I want to do is waste it searching around for an opponent or playing only half a game because little Johnny can't stand to have his precious record blemished.

Okay, I can hear you saying, "Well, just find some reliable people to play against and schedule a time to meet." In a perfect world this might be a viable solution, but I find it hard to predict when I'll be available to play. I'm sure a lot of you are in the same boat, and trying to coordinate a time that's right can be a real headache.

My biggest problem with online gaming is that it isn't conducive to my style of play. I get the most enjoyment from playing multiple seasons and seeing how my team evolves over time. Sure, league play is possible with multiple players, but it's a veritable scheduling nightmare. Truthfully, I just can't be bothered.

I'm curious how the readers of this column feel about this subject. If you look at the sports game reviews I write, you may notice that I mainly discuss how the single-player portion of the game works. Is this how the majority of you play the game? Am I out of touch with the rest of the sports gamers out there (hey, it wouldn't be the first time)? Please drop me a line at *rob@pcgamer.com* and let me know. PCG



Playing sports games like NBA Live 2000 online can be a lot of fun, but it can never match the depth or convenience of the single-player features, according to our sports expert.

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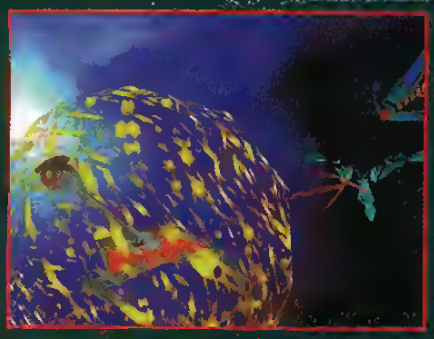
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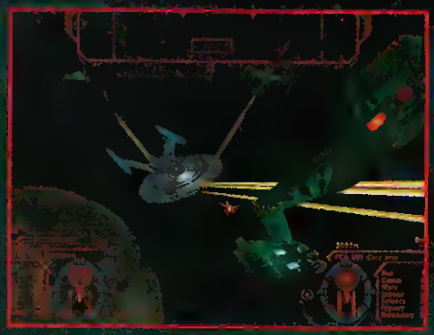
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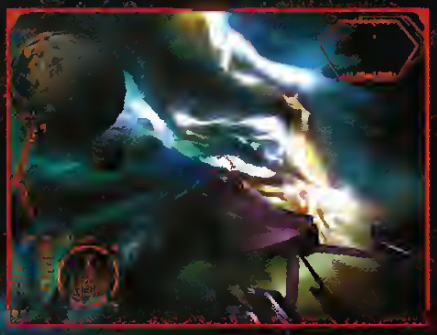
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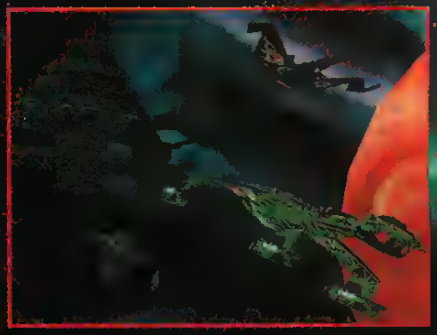
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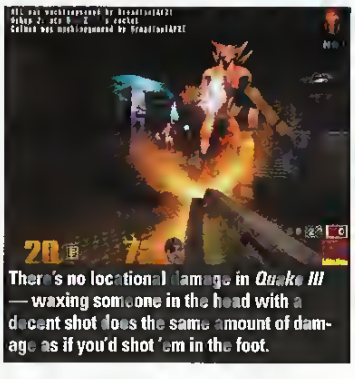
The Shoot-'Em Up Showdown

Colin hands down the definitive verdict on which of these three hot headliner multiplayer games really rules the action-gaming roost.

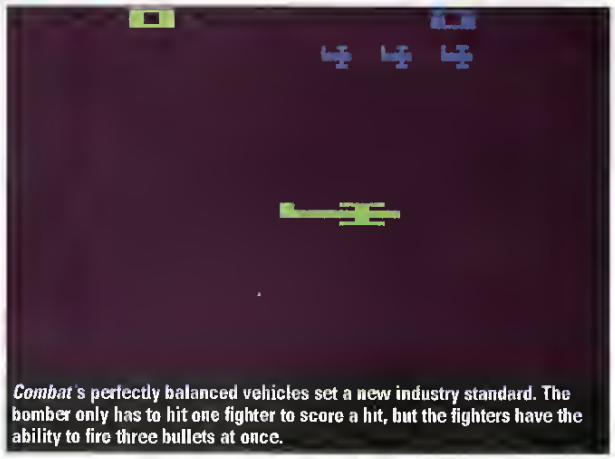
Oh, the horror. Contrary to our initial predictions, *Quake III Arena* and *Unreal Tournament* ended up shipping darn near simultaneously, resulting in a bloody clash of the deathmatch titans. Thus the typically joyous holiday season ran red with blood, as the Internet crowd erupted into full-scale war. This Christmas I found my time, and affections, divided between *three* brilliant multiplayer games. On websites and message boards everywhere, fellow gamers were arguing over rocket launcher placement in Q3DM4, shock rifle splash radius, and whether or not Paul Steed could kick Cliff Bleszinski's ass in real life.

So what's the scoop? Who prevailed in the greatest title-versus-title showdown of the millennium? Enter *PC Gamer* on its magical flying horsie to dish out the props and the ass-beatings to the parties responsible. This month, I'm going to closely compare three multiplayer milestones and determine which will stand the test of time.

In the first corner, we have *Unreal Tournament* from Epic Games and Digital Extremes. This plucky contender comes with plenty of single-player experience, along with a graphics engine that's still looking good after a year of competition. Plus, one of the *UT* designers was behind the Internet's Cat Scan contest, where hundreds of entrants mashed their felines into flatbed scanners with hilarious results.



There's no locational damage in *Quake III* — waxing someone in the head with a decent shot does the same amount of damage as if you'd shot 'em in the foot.



Combat's perfectly balanced vehicles set a new industry standard. The bomber only has to hit one fighter to score a hit, but the fighters have the ability to fire three bullets at once.

In the darkly lit, brown and gothic-looking corner, we have *Quake III Arena* from id Software. After defining the first-person shooter genre for the rest of the industry, id decided to concentrate on what it does best — hardcore deathmatch gameplay. Actually, I get the feeling that id can't do much more of anything *but* hardcore deathmatch gameplay, but I'll shut up about that for now.

And in the third, somewhat pixelated corner, we have *Combat* for the Atari 2600. Even though it's a little behind the times, the grand-daddy of multiplayer computer battle is ready to take on both newcomers with grit and gumption. *Combat* kicked ass then; does it kick ass now, against the best and brightest in modern multiplayer mayhem?

Interface

For as long as we can remember, gamers hankerin' for online play had to go through a third-party player-matching service, like GameSpy. But when Valve built a mini-server browser into *Half-Life*, the masses took notice — it's currently one of the most-played games on the Internet, and the number of players per day makes my head spin.

In turn, *Unreal Tournament*'s interface is even more robust, featuring a beautiful mouse-driven GUI that's as user-friendly as you can get. General set-up is a snap with the Windows-styled interface, and the game courteously takes you by the hand — a plus for newbies who don't even know what the tilde key is. Finding somewhere to play online is never a problem, and servers have been regularly packed since launch.

Quake III's interface doesn't fare quite as well. Actually, it looks like a slapped-together clusterscrew with no regard for functionality or design — hell, I've seen better interfaces in unlicensed bootleg Super Nintendo games. At least the server browser is halfway decent, but I'd still rather use GameSpy.

On the other hand, *Combat* gets you into blistering tank-versus-tank mayhem without a hitch. A variety of games are accessible by pressing the select button on the *console itself* (ingenious, and dead simple). Sadly, the player-matching service is a bit lacking; instead of pointing and clicking with the joystick, I had to *physically* call up my friend Dave and ask him if he wanted to come over and play. This is an unfortunate result of the 2600's lackluster networking capabilities.

Graphics

When it comes to graphics engines, few people can kick 'em out like John Carmack. The *Quake III* renderer provides the ability to create curved surfaces (this makes all the difference in the world to some people, but I can't figure out why), and right purty special effects. Though the texture detail is mind-numbingly beautiful and the player models are the results of too much testosterone, the majority of the game's environments are close-quarters dungeons and other murky-brown Goth pits. Every level looks like a different Cure concert. In short, ninety percent of the arenas look like the same stuff you pounded through in the first two Quake games. The only noteworthy addition to id's deathmatch formula is the jump pad — hop onto these circular patches, and you're sent sailing through the air like Sonic the Hedgehog.

On the other hand, the *Unreal* engine has the uncanny ability to create unbelievably huge vistas without expense of framerate. The *UT* maps show a lot of creativity, and range from your standard close-quarters garages and dungeons to spaceships hurtling through the cosmos

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at light-speed, to galleons floating on the open sea, to giant meteors orbiting a planet (the spinning motion of that level is quite effective at inducing nausea). Though you can only choose from human character models (as of now, anyway), they feature marvelously detailed faces and great idling animations. Just think of it as *Tribes* on meth.

Instead of wrestling with the chore of a high-end 3D engine, *Combat* goes for a more stylized, "less is more" approach to in-game visuals. The cruelty of human conflict is reflected in the minimalist representations of tanks and planes: if *Quake III* is a Monet, *Combat* is a Mondrian. But if you're still put off by the blockiness of the graphics, you can turn on hardware anti-aliasing — find the *sharpness* control on your TV set and crank it all the way down. You can also blur the image somewhat by ingesting large amounts of alcohol, but this may result in control problems.

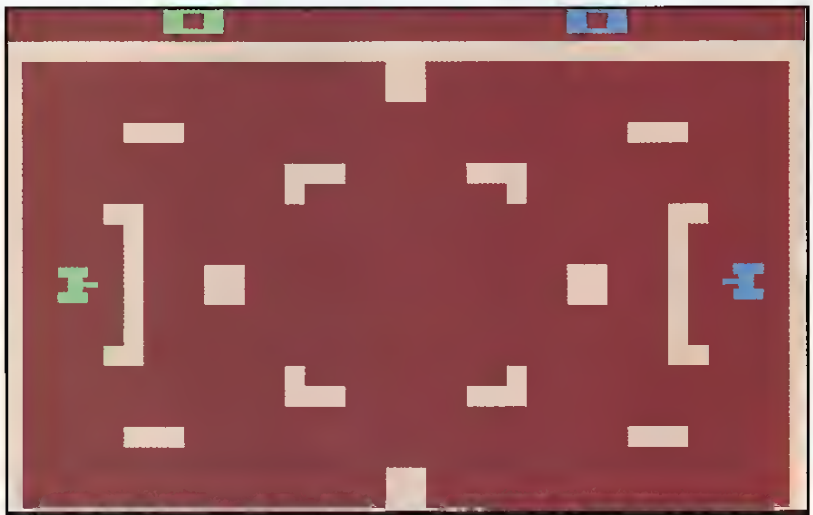
AI

All three games attempt to cozy up fashionably with the single-player crowd by including intelligent computer-controlled opponents who fight and die like real humans. *Unreal Tournament* succeeds the most admirably, with a cast of characters who play just like the fellow gamers you'd meet online. They camp out in logical locations, run like hell when wounded, and explode into meaty chunks *real good*. Best of all, they communicate via voice, and have no qualms about shouting "Die, bitch" as they steer a remote-controlled warhead into your breadbasket.

The bots in *Quake III* aren't quite as human as the *Unreal Tournament* guys — but feature a scripting language that allows you to type in detailed orders. Though phrases like *I AM THE LEADER* and *SARGE GET THE FLAG* are quite useful, they still can't grasp commands along the lines of *YO DOOFUS, STOP RUNNING IN CIRCLES AND FOLLOW MY ORDERS*.

Instead of giving you verbal beatings with recorded voice taunts, *QIII*'s bots taunt you with text messages. While there are hundreds more taunts than *UT*, the downside is that they sound like they were written by a 15-year-old glue-sniffer (On second thought, those would probably have been funny). And at higher levels of difficulty, enemies have no problem sniping you with a railgun from a half-mile away — if you can beat the final boss on Nightmare mode, I regard you as a deathmatch lord. Now go read a book.

Right now you're probably thinking "Wait a second! *Combat* should be exempt from this category — it's a two-player-*only* game!" Au contraire: the artificial intelligence in *Combat* is much more subtle, simulating a suicidal opponent who has nothing left to live for. The enemy tank will sit motionless for hours, contemplating the futility of war. One time, I think my enemy twitched a bit, but that was probably because the cat bumped the second joystick. Brilliant, but *Unreal Tournament* takes the lead for its challenge factor.



With ricocheting bullets and white-knuckle suspense, *Tank-Pong* is a deadly game of cat-and-mouse.



It's death from afar! Sniping your enemies from a half-mile away is one of *Unreal Tournament*'s greatest thrills.

Gameplay

This is what it all boils down to, and *Unreal Tournament* kicks *Quake III*'s ass like it's a no-holds-barred match between Royce Gracie and my dead Uncle Grover. While *QIII* limits you to stock deathmatch and weak-ass CTF, *UT* hits you in the face with an outrageous number of gameplay modes and special features. The best of these is *Assault*, best described as first-person *Command and Conquer*. One team has to attack a base and secure objectives, while another team tries to keep 'em out. *Domination* requires tactical control of map points (similar to *TeamFortress*' Canal Zone). And don't forget to turn on the "mutators," which completely modify your game — activate "low gravity" and "jumpmatch," and you're playing *The Matrix*! All of the mutators can be combined at once, and used in any type of network game. It's worth noting that some of these mutators can be recreated in *QIII* with a bit of scripting and console work, but it isn't the dead-simple point-and-click affair of *UT*.

Activision's exuberant PR spiel describes *Quake III* as "pure arcade deathmatch." This cleverly translates as "the same running-around-and-killing-stuff we've beaten to death over the last five years." While *UT* takes a giant step forward in team-based, social play, *Quake III* remains rooted in the same mindless slaughter that's grown weaker with each passing incarnation. Planned features like multiple character classes, jetpacks, grappling hooks, and dropping ammo to run faster were all given the axe, and the result is a pared-down game that shys away from trying anything new for fear of alienating its hardcore audience.

But when all's said and done, *Combat* is the winner. Despite its lack of 32-bit texturing and the absence of quadratic NURB patches, the exhilaration of gameplay modes like *Tank-Pong*, *Fighters versus Bomber*, and *Jets* is inspired gaming brilliance. But if you *must* have the latest and greatest, my advice is to run out and buy *Unreal Tournament*, order some pizzas, and hold all your calls. As is tradition, it might be wise to hold off on *Quake III* until the Internet user base actually *finishes* the game in a few months with the traditional player mods. As for me, I'm going to go play Atari.

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ALTERNATE LIVES

ADVENTURE AND ROLEPLAYING GAMES · NEWS · TRENDS

Nihilistic Storytelling

After a rousing Storyteller game of *Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption*, Da Wolf shares his adventures in a game where another player takes on the role of God.

I couldn't believe my luck. After months of waiting, drooling, and anticipating, I was finally going to get a chance to check out the Storyteller portion of Nihilistic's upcoming *Vampire: The Masquerade — Redemption*. For those who don't know, the Storyteller portion of *Redemption* is the multiplayer aspect that will let players who run the game (known in pencil-and-paper roleplaying as Dungeon Masters or Game Masters) control all the action and events for a group of player characters traveling through the gameworld (in this case, the ancient and modern eras of *Vampire*). Nihilistic promises the ability to create custom maps, scripts, and even models or whole new game systems depending on how deeply a player wants to delve into the scripting language. For less intensive adventures, the Storyteller can simply possess any character at will for live conversations with NPCs, or spawn or kill monsters as needed.

After months of hearing all about it from Activision and Nihilistic, I finally had a chance to go directly to Nihilistic's offices in San Rafael, California, and participate in a game with Ray Gresko, president of Nihilistic and *Vampire*'s lead designer.

The Storyteller has a whole host of menus, commands, actions, and abilities available to him. He can instantly possess any creature. He can center the camera on whatever character he desires. He can have private conversations with an individual character, or initiate conversation through an NPC. He could instantly spawn a monster, trigger a script, or simply watch the action unfold. The power of the Storyteller is absolute, and can be as complex as running through a series of scripts that controls in-game movies, or as simple as just watching over the players as they fight the computer-controlled NPCs.



The Storyteller will have full control over everything in the game, including placing new monsters and talking through NPCs.

After getting the gist of what to expect, I sat down to begin a game. I was in charge of a basic fighter who was the leader of the party. My companion was Serena, a smart-mouthed vampire with a penchant for sarcasm. We began our adventure in a smoky inn, deep in the heart of a nameless medieval city; just one of several multiplayer modules that will ship with the finished product. My companion (played by a Nihilistic employee) started badmouthing the locals, and no matter how much I tried to silence her (being the gentleman that I am), she managed to provoke just about everyone.

Eventually, a couple of local drunks related a story of how a disease had struck the town. Their most holy object, the reliquary from the local church, had been stolen. And, naturally, werewolves wandered the landscape beyond the city limits, making evening travel suicidal. Upon leaving the inn, we came across a gnarly Nosferatu, who had a task for us, which of course required entering a dank, dark dungeon and battling some undead nasties.

While I'm greatly abbreviating the story here, the feeling of immersion was incredible. My companion Serena let forth a constant stream of sarcasm, which I attempted to parry with my somewhat lacking wit — all within character, of course. As we combated the bad guys, we often died, but the Storyteller would quickly resurrect us. The rest of the team would occasionally gather around the monitors, saying things like "Check out that trap I just added," and "Make him go through the labyrinth." We killed. We laughed, and eventually I got to watch over Ray's shoulder as he simply and easily kept track of our progress, spawned a few new monsters, and deftly resurrected us from the grave when things got a bit too crazy. Unlike the multiplayer aspect of *Baldur's Gate*, players in *Vampire* don't need to stick together. The Storyteller's machine loads all levels that players are currently occupying, so even if they're scattered all through the game, the Storyteller can jump from one to the other, which also means Storytellers can create puzzles that require teamwork and communication to pass.

What really stuck me was the feeling of playing a multiplayer game, but with real roleplayers. Granted, in practice it might be difficult to find players who want to take their roles seriously (just as in most massively multiplayer games), but the ability to easily chat, perform actions, and react to the environment made the game feel like a massively multiplayer game with only a few people in it (and a lot fewer comments like "Where can I find the Axe of Might?"). And most of the immersion came from the NPCs, with whom we had *real* conversations, not canned dialogues meant to point players in a single direction (granted, Ray's typing skills make talking to NPCs a time-consuming affair, but pre-written dialogue responses helped with that). The Storyteller's constant presence was obvious — he was in the characters we spoke with, in the monsters we fought, and in the clues we got to help us through the labyrinth.

The worst part of the evening by far was when the food arrived, and we took a break. The computers crashed (the game's still an early version, after all) which, unfortunately, marked the end of the journey for the evening (I'd just gotten through the labyrinth, too!). The result is that now, after having had a taste for the multiplayer aspects of this promising roleplaying game, and imagining what it would be like with several characters all playing their roles with a well-versed and inventive Storyteller to drive the adventure, my desire for the finished product is greater than ever.

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¡Yo quiero South American wars!

The Colonel designs a hypothetical wargame and puts *magweb.com* to the acid test. His conclusion: Any historical scenario can be modeled using this resource.

About a year ago, I called readers' attention to a then-new web site named *magweb.com* where the military history/wargaming enthusiast could, for a modest user fee, browse through a fantastic archive of esoteric and hard-to-find publications. When *USA Today* named MagWeb one of its select "Hot Sites," I decided it was time to take another, deeper look, to ascertain the value of this resource to a hypothetical wargame designer (someone, say, who's using the modeling utilities that come with *Operational Art of War*).

The Napoleonic and Civil War periods were just too easy, as were the two World Wars. Then I remembered an intriguing scenario in Norm Koger's *Age of Rifles*, dealing with a little-known but exceedingly bloody war between Bolivia and Paraguay in the years 1932-1935. I knew it was named the "Chaco" War after the desolate wasteland the two nations were squabbling over, and I knew it was devastating (approximately 20 percent of the male population of Paraguay perished). I suspected, also, that the between-world-wars technology and tactics would prove interesting, as would the logistical challenges — in short, a very interesting topic for a home-grown wargame.

So I logged on to MagWeb and started digging. The first revelation I encountered was a quarterly journal named *El Dorado*, published by the South and Central American Military Historians Society. Would you like to read a once-Top Secret report on the Peruvian armed forces in 1925, filed by the U.S. military attache in Lima? It's here, folks. Or check out the 250-odd unit patches worn by Panamanian troops since WWII? That's here, too.

More to the point, I quickly located an incredibly detailed article on the use of armor in the pivotal battle of Ayala (July, 1933), and a long bibliography of books in Spanish (many of which, it turned out, could be special-ordered through one of the rare book services that advertises on MagWeb). I also found smaller articles on the various South American naval and air forces during the thirties.

Probing deeper, I turned up the fact that Game Designers Workshop had actually published a Chaco War board game in the seventies. It would now be incredibly rare, of course, but through MagWeb's bulletin boards and discussion groups, sooner or later I'd find some old grognard who would be willing to sell me his dusty copy, or at least loan it to me.

The next revelation was a more modern board game packaged with issue no. 12 of *Command Magazine*, which also featured a superbly detailed historical essay. As it happened, I had that issue stored in the attic and was able to retrieve it, but just knowing it *existed* would enable another researcher to send off for a back issue (it's still available!). And with this discovery, I suddenly had God's own plenty of information about the Chaco War: Maps, orders of battle for both sides, types of tanks, planes, and artillery employed, and lots of additional reference sources.

In the space of a single afternoon, I located and printed out approximately 50 pages of useful information *and* discovered that my idea for an "original" game was valid only in the PC format. I never had to leave my desk; I never had to spend hours tracking down obscure data at the local university library, nor did I have to wait weeks for the inter-library loan system to locate the more esoteric, Spanish-language books (if, indeed, they could be obtained at all).

In theory at least, I now had enough hard information to sketch out the basic parameters of my hypothetical game. And I had it all in the space of four rather pleasant hours.

But wait! There's more! As every researcher knows, one of the most delightful aspects of that chore is the serendipitous discovery of what I call Stuff-I-Learned-While-Looking-Up-Other-Stuff. I also read about three limited but very interesting wars between Ecuador and Peru (in 1941, 1985, and 1995, respectively). Each was fought over some God-forsaken (but resource-rich) province in the Andes or in the jungles of the Upper Amazon. Each was very different from the other. Helicopter and special forces operations dominated the two modern wars, and airborne operations decided the outcome in 1941.

Turns out that Peru's high command had paid attention to the recent blitzkrieg victories in Europe and, with help from an Italian training mission and a few dozen Caproni bombers and transports, formed a small but elite airborne force, which performed brilliantly in the 1941 conflict. Jeez, who woulda thunk it?

So now my hypothetical PC wargame metamorphosed into a modular quartet of mini-games base on these extraordinary but little-known conflicts.

As far as I'm concerned, MagWeb passed the test with flying colors. As of January 2000, the site had archives from 75 journals (approximately 17,000 articles with full text *and* graphics), discussion groups, a shopping mall, and lots of free samples you can download if your interest gets piqued. A year's subscription works out to about five dollars a month. It would have cost me that much just to photocopy the information from the library. So, all you amateur wargamers, you now know where to do your digging.

PCG



No matter how old, obscure, or dated the warfare, ***magweb.com*** probably has a wealth of information for you to adapt the era to a modern computer game.

ANDY MAHOOD



SIM COLUMN

DRIVING FLYING FIGHTING BUILDING ETC.

Dec. 7, 1999: A day of infamy

Andy commiserates as it becomes obvious that Hasbro is pulling the pioneering MicroProse out of the simulation market for the foreseeable future.

December 7, 1941, will be forever remembered as the date on which the Japanese executed a surprise early morning air raid on the U.S. Navy base at Pearl Harbor and plunged America into World War Two. FDR's angry denunciation of the attack — "a day that will live in infamy!" — would ultimately become one of the most celebrated quotes of our century.

December 7, 1999, will be remembered by dedicated flight sim enthusiasts for an entirely different type of sneak attack. It was on this date that Hasbro Interactive released its now infamous press release outlining the company's plan to discontinue *Falcon 4.0* — perhaps the most revered combat jet simulator ever developed for the PC. As soon as this news hit the Internet, thousands of devoted *F4* fans around the world responded en masse with cries of outrage over Hasbro's cavalier dismissal of their favorite military flight simulator. "Burn in hell, Furby and Pokémon!" was a common theme with some of the move's more vocal opponents. "Who do these philistine toymakers think they are? Cancelling *Falcon* just to make room for more stuffed animals and trading cards!"

The inescapable fact is that Hasbro has chosen to pull MicroProse out of the sim market altogether and the remarkable legacy established by pioneers like Sid Meier, Andy Hollis, and Gilman Louie comes to a sad close.

Well, the simple answer is that they are toymakers first and foremost and their priorities are naturally going to lie with what gives them the best return on their money. Sure, it sucks that the fickle desires of some snot-nosed ankle-biter are ultimately controlling the industry that gives us our new flight sim products, but whaddayagonnado? From a purely pragmatic point of view, you'd have to be crazy to dump millions of dollars and countless man-hours into the development of a complex piece of software like *Falcon 4.0* for a relatively small niche market when a simple plush toy can outperform it by a thousand to one.

Or would you? When Hasbro took over MicroProse in 1998, they knew exactly what they were buying. In addition to a highly touted line of PC strategy titles like *X-COM* and *Master of Orion*, MicroProse was also the creative force behind such critically acclaimed simulations as *Gunship*, *Tank Platoon*, *European Air War*, and, of course, *Falcon*. The *Falcon 4.0* project was only a couple of months away from fruition at that point, and most of its considerable development costs had already been realized.

Fast forward to winter of 1999, and the picture becomes dramatically different. Despite some extensive patching, *Falcon 4.0* still contained a significant number of bugs and only managed to achieve modest retail success. Gilman Louie, the guiding light of MicroProse, also decided to jump the Hasbro ship in order to head up a new venture capital company developing information technology for the CIA (perhaps he saw the writing on the wall at Hasbro and decided to work for some people whose agenda didn't involve catering to kiddies). Combine these two factors with the through-the-roof popularity of talking Furby dolls and Pokémon collectibles, and you wind up with a corporate decision that practically makes itself.



Flight sim enthusiasts who rallied around MicroProse's classic contributions will now have to suffice with memories.

So why did these toymakers step in and buy MicroProse in the first place? Was it always part of their plan to trim out the high-cost/low-return simulation line in favor of more popular strategy titles like *RollerCoaster Tycoon*? I put the question to MicroProse marketing director Tom Nichols. Is Hasbro still committed to MicroProse's three remaining in-development titles now that it's getting out of the high-end sim business?

"Yes, we are fully committed to those products," he says. "*Gunship* and *Tank Platoon* are being developed in our Hunt Valley studio by the same great team that produced *M1 Tank Platoon II*. *B-17 Flying Fortress II* is also on track for release this spring, under development at Wayward Simulations in Bristol, England."

Fair enough, but it's probably a safe bet that they'll also be dumbed down somewhat to appeal to a broader audience. Nichols refutes this, however. "These games were designed from the start to appeal to an audience that goes beyond the hardcore flight simulation crowd," he says. "*Gunship* and *Tank Platoon*, for example, contain a lot of action-oriented features that take the busywork of commanding the vehicle out of your way so that you can focus on the real action. These have been design goals throughout the product's life, and haven't changed due to the recent announcements."

Nichols also went on to say, however, that once this current trio of in-progress sims have completed their development cycles that will be the end of MicroProse's military simulation product line Just as there will never be a *Falcon 5*, neither will there be a *Gunship 2* or *European Air War 2*. "We have not written off the brand names, however," he states, "so if future market and business conditions are favorable for us to release simulation games, we will look at that opportunity closely."

This is all standard corporate rhetoric that sim fans probably shouldn't read too much into. The inescapable fact is that Hasbro has chosen to pull MicroProse out of the sim market altogether and the remarkable legacy established by pioneers like Sid Meier, Andy Hollis, and Gilman Louie comes to a sad close with that decision. In an ironic twist of fate, the much-anticipated 1.08 patch for *Falcon 4.0* — which finally fixes most of the sim's major bugs — was released on that same fateful December 7 date that the hard-working crew responsible for its creation were all handed their pink slips.

A day that will live in infamy indeed.

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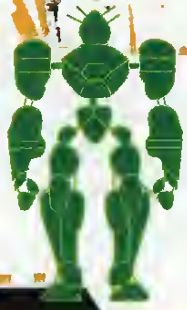
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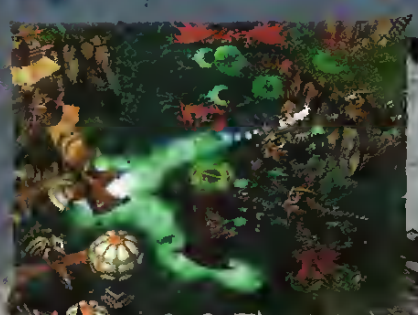
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Tomb Raider: The Last Revelation

The fourth (and final?) installment in the Lara Croft franchise lives up to the series' tough reputation. Special thanks, then, to Brian King, Corey Fong, Franklin Vasquez, Billy Mitchell, Dan Franklin, Eruch Adams, Shawn Taylor, and Shilo Anacleto for their hard work in assembling this invaluable guide. A full, step-by-step walkthrough would take about 30 pages, so instead we'll just be covering the game's most challenging areas.

Angkor Wat and Race for the Iris

In this first part of the game, we're introduced to a young Lara Croft and her mantor, Werner Von Croy, and put through a tutorial session es Von Croy shows you how to complete each action thet Lara will be using within the game.

Tomb of Seth, Burial Chambers, Valley of the Kings and KV5

In this section, Lare unwittingly releases an evil spirit in her quest to get the Amulet of Horus. She will also learn that others are after this prize as the player is introduced to an older and angrier Von Croy.

Temple of Karnak, The Great Hypostyle Hall, Sacred Lake

Now thet Lera is starting to realize the implications of what she has released, it's time for her to do some investigeting. We are re-introduced to Lara's longtime friend, Jean-Yves as well es some baddies that prove to be a little less hospitable. We're also introduced to a concept thet is relatively new in the Tomb Raider world...the idea of backtracking from a more advanced level to a previous level to finish e puzzle.

In these levels, you will need to grab two Canopic Jars that will allow you access to the area where you will need to get the Sun Goddess idol. One of these will be located near the entrance to the next level. The other will be located in the Sacred Lake level (this will be the first, but not only, time in this game where the player will heve to grab items in one level in order to becktrack and complete an earlier level).

Tomb of Semerkhet, Guardian of Semerkhet, Desert Railroad

At the end of the last level, Von Croy steals the Amulet of Horus from Lara and traps her in the Tomb of Semerkhet In the next series of levels, Lara will have to

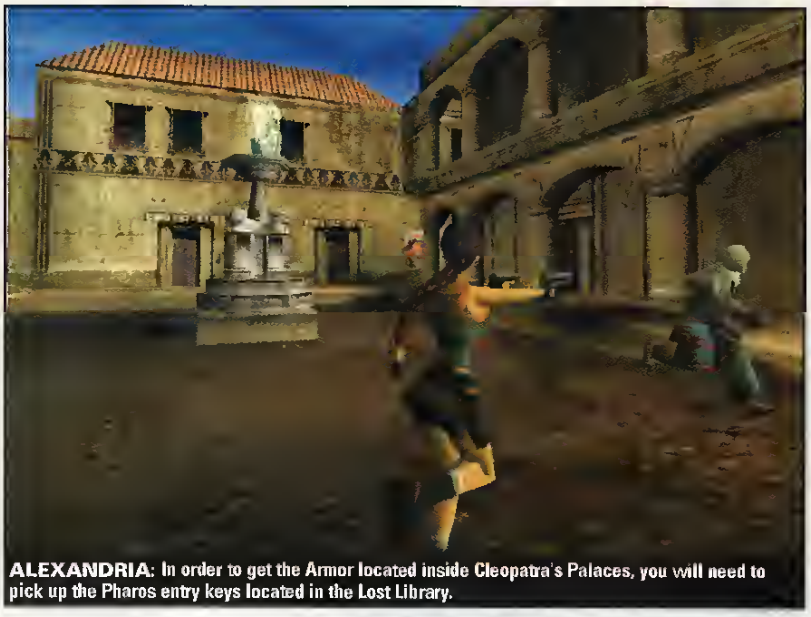


SACRED LAKE: Be sure to grab all of the items here in order to complete an earlier level.



TOMB OF SEMERKHET: You need to escape the tomb in order to catch up with Von Croy and take back the Amulet of Horus.

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ALEXANDRIA: In order to get the Armor located inside Cleopatra's Palaces, you will need to pick up the Pharos entry keys located in the Lost Library.

try to make her way out of this tomb and find her way to Alexandrie to catch up with Von Croy and the stolen amulet.

Alexandria, Coastal Ruins, Catacombs, Temple of Poseidon, The Lost Library, Hall of Demitrius, Pharos, Temple of Isis

This next sequence of levels will take Lara through the ruins of Alexandria and into the Lost Library in another dizzying display of back-tracking and side-stepping. The purpose of the next set of levels will be to get the Armor that is located within Cleopatra's Palaces. In order to gain access to this area, however, you'll first have to find the entry keys to Pharos in the Lost Library and the Hall of Demitrius. In order to get there you must travel through a network of Catacombs and through Poseidon's Temple.



CATACOMBS: You will use all of your skills negotiating these treacherous hallways.

Cleopatra's Palaces

GETTING THE FOURTH BEETLE

Upon entering this level, walk through the hallway until you get to an opening with a fountain and greenery and whatnot. Head north and walk up e small flight of stairs. Turn left (west) and you'll see a slope that goes up to a second floor. Walk up this slope and turn 180 degrees. You'll see a wall tile with a face on it. Walk up to this tile and use your crowbar to pry it open. Walk through the next section until you get to another face tile. Use your crowbar again and walk into the next room where there will be a hole in the floor.

Drop into this hole and slide down the path. Jump and push to the left before you reach the water level below as the path you'll need to take (it has a T intersection) is the left (north) path. Walk through the water and get out before it catches fire. Pry the Black Beetle from the well here. Turn around and jump to the other side of the water. Walk up the newly formed stairs and backtrack back to the Black Pyramid room.

Re-enter the gardens section of the pelaces and walk up the northern small stairwell, only this time go streight. As you reach the end of the hall, turn left, end et your first chance, turn right and walk up to the spot with the beetle painted on the floor.

You will notice holes in the floor before you. These are instant deeth spike traps. Place the Mechenical Scarab on the floor on the dot of the painted beetle and it will move ecross and deactivate the spike trap before stopping on the other side. It is now sefe to walk across. You will have to do this with every spot that you see this.

Turn left and go up the walkway toward the room with a casket in it. As you walk through the entrance of this room, a trap will activate that will periodically block the exit of this room. Push open tha casket and grab the right gauntlet. Walk back out of the room and return to the room below.

Turn left and walk into the next room. Turn right and walk up to the next floor trap area. Use the Scarab again. Walk up the eastern stairwell and down the next one.

Walk toward the stairs in front of you, but instead of going up them, turn left and walk down the next hallway. There will be a lever on the wall that you must jump up and grab. This will raise a floor tile and release a skeleton. Jump up onto the new block.

While facing west, jump across to the wall and grab onto the holding area of this well. Since the hole is too small to climb into, you will have to shimmy to the right until you are able to climb up to the level above.

Walk into the north room and push open the casket in this room to grab the right greave. Return to where you pulled up to this level and drop back down. Walk down the south hallway and turn left. There will now be a new opening on the left (north) side.

Open the casket in this new room. Open this casket to grab the Pharos Knot. Exit the room again and turn left. Walk to end of this next area and turn left again.

Instead of walking up the stairs to the left, walk through the hellway that is right after it. In the next room, there will be a small stairwell that leads up to a locked door end a keyhole in which you place the Pharos Knot. This will open the door right next to you. Walk through this door.

There will be two blocks in the center of the room. Walk onto the one closest to you. Two yellow beams will appear from these blocks with a "golden Lara" appearing on the other block. Do not harm this Lara, as you will take damage. This will raise a block on the north side of the room. Climb onto this block and jump and grab onto the ceiling above. Monkey swing until you reach the block on the other side.

Walk into the short hallway after this block end turn around. Climb onto the ledge above you end walk about



CLEOPATRA'S PALACES: Head north when you reach this room with a fountain.



CLEOPATRA'S PALACES: You will start meeting some unfriendly dead guys in this level. Take 'em out quick.

halfwey across. Turn left and jump onto the ledge on the other side. Turn right, walk to the end of the path, and climb into the hole in the wall.

Walk through the hallway and climb onto the next ledge. Walk out south and jump onto the central platform. To both your west and east will be levers abova you that you must jump to grab. These will open the doors to which you'll get the ornate handle and the hathor effigy. After grabbing these items, return to the central platform, turn south, and jump onto the ledge at this side.

Combine the two pieces to create the portal guardian. Place this on the pole next to the door to open the door. Walk through the door and into the next hallway until a cut scene plays in which Lara sits in the queen's throne and activates the two Queen's Guards. Fight the two guards. After killing both of them, go into the rooms that they came from and open both caskets to get the left greave and the breast plate.

Upon her return to Alexandria with the Armor, Lara finds that Jean-Yves hes been kidnapped by Von Croy. Upset by such a cowardly deed, she immediately heads out in search of her friend.

Although there will be some undead to face in the upcoming levels, it is the henchmen and trained military men that Lara must look out for. We also start to get an idea of the scope of what is happening with the release of Set as we're introduced to giant dragon-like creatures as well.

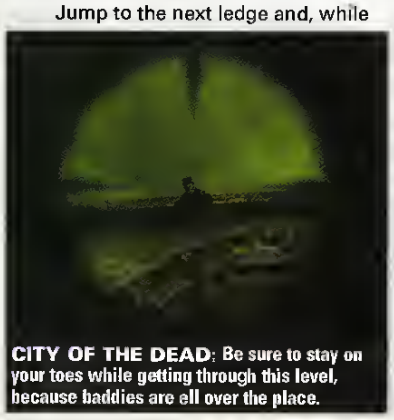
City of the Dead, Trenches, Chambers of Tulun, Street Bazaar, Citadel Gate, Citadel

Turn right at the first intersection, and then leave the bike behind at the next turn. Walk through the north entrance into the chambers and walk through them until you come out the other side. Turn left and follow this path until you see the Egyptian Hammer God. Return to the chambers with him following.

Run south through the chambers until you are forced to climb a block to get out the other side. Instead of doing this, however, turn to your right and climb up the large block.

Facing north, run and jump across this opening and grab onto the ledge on the other side. Climb up onto this and walk to the northern end of it and tum left.

Jump to the next ledge and, while falling, grab onto it. Swing to your right at this point until you can bring yourself up to the level above. Face north again and jump onto the side of the block you are facing. Swing around two corners on this block and drop onto the other side.



CITY OF THE DEAD: Be sure to stay on your toes while getting through this level, because baddies are ell over the place.



TRENCHES: Good thing Lara is a pistol-packing hottie — otherwise, we wouldn't get cool screenshots like this one to print in our magazine.



CHAMBERS OF TULUN: Your bike will come in handy on this level so you can drive eround the sides of the mosque to avoid the hammer guy.

Walk down this next path until it dead-ends. Climb up to the next level and take this path until you see a lever. Pull on this lever and, after the cut scene plays that shows the hammer guy trapped, walk down to the southern edge of the level you are on. Jump onto the right hand ledge, and then jump onto the next ledge after this.

You can now jump on the rope in the middle of this area. Once on the rope, turn yourself around so that you are facing south and swing onto the southern top ledge from here. Drop into the hole in this area and slide down the path onto the street below.

Get back on your bike and quickly drive around the sides of the mosque. There will be a ravine to jump across about halfway there. Once on the other side, you'll turn one more left and see that your path is blocked by a level of bricks. Quickly get off the bike (because the doors to the mosque *will* open again and let the hammer guy out again, in which case you'll have to do all of this all over again) and head back toward where you first sew the hammer guy.

There will be a wheel with handles on the right side of the street. Pull on the wheel handles about five or six times to open the door on the right wall. Go through this door and climb up the western ladder.

Backtrack back down the ladder and turn right when at the bottom. Take this hallway until it dead-ends and jump up and climb over the wall. You'll slide down to the main road again. Head back down to your bike, get on, and drive up the path that leads to the north.

Climb into the northern hole in the wall near the area you dropped from. Walk all the way back out the way you came until you get to your bike again. Drive in the only direction that you can (without exiting the level) until you reach a ravine (around one corner). Turn around and use the nitrous boost to drive over a small stairwell and onto a level above that. Get out of the bike.

Walk into the one door that is on this level and slide down the path. Walk down the northern passage and pick up the torch in the room that this leads to. Return to the main room here and take the right (western) passage from this room. This will lead to a room with a torch lit on the wall. Light the torch you are holding and return to the main room.

Walk up to the eastern side of this room and up the slope to the upper level. Place the torch near the sprinkler system on the ceiling to activate it and open the door you're next to. Walk through this door and pull the lever that is in here. After the cut scene plays, go back into the main room here and walk back through the northern hallway.

When you enter the room where you found the torch, climb onto the box that is to your right when you entered this room. Face east and jump across to the ledge on the other side. Drop down the other side of this ledge and face north.

Shoot the box in front of you to reveal a gate with a lock on it. Laser sight in on the lock and shoot the lock

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off the door. Walk through the gate. Reach into the hole in the wall to get the roof key. Backtrack to the room where the last lever was pulled, but go right where you turned left to get to the lever. Follow this path to return to the area where your bike is.

The Sphinx Complex, Underneath the Sphinx, Pyramid of Menkaure, Inside Menkaure's Pyramid, The Mastabas, The Great Pyramid, Khufu's Queen's Pyramids

So Lara has saved her friend and now possessas both the Armor and the Amulet. It is now time to "set things right again" as she says. We follow Lara in har quest to put Set back to rest, only this time for eternity. Seeing as these levels take place mainly in tombs and pyramids that haven't seen life in thousends of years, you'll find yourself dealing with puzzles and death traps more often than hand-to-hand combat. Don't take that the wrong way however, as you must stay on your toes more in these final levels than any other in the game. We've gone into some specific details for these last three levels:

Inside the Great Pyramid

Walk down the slope to the edge and do a run'n'jump across the drop. Take care of the enemies on the other side.

Go east and up the slope past the gate. Walk slowly, straight into the next room. At this point Lara will trigger two side to side sliding pillars. Get as close as possible to the first pillar and forward-jump. Time the jump just as the pillar begins to slide into the middle. Do the same for the second one.

Kill the possessed dogs. Pick up the torch in the marble rectangle and light it up using the burning torch on the wall and pressing action. After the torch is lit, walk to the unlit torches and light them up. This will open up the wall to the west. Hit the switch in there and make your way back south through the sliding pillars.

Once past the pillars, head up north. In this room there are four star-shaped key holes where you will place the four "Shaft Keys" in your inventory. Next hit the switch on the north wall and take care of the bad guys.

Return to the room where the torch was found and hit the switch on the east wall. This will open the gate all the way at the bottom of the main corridor.

Exit the room and head south until the main corridor. Then head north all the way down the corridor. Be cautious as there are several long jumps to be mede along the way. Once in the final room, climb down the pit and head east at the junction. Jump down.

Temple of Horus

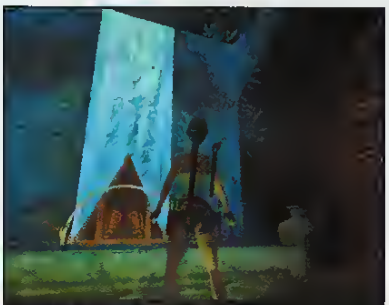
Go north and pick-up the five liter weterskin on the ground. Notice the two water symbols on the water fountain well. This is the correct amount of liters that needs to be poured into the vase that is placed on the balance to the north in order for the floor gate between the fountains to open. The wrong amount will open the gate to the south and release the monster.

Fill up the five liter bag and combine it with the three liter bag. Now take the five liter bag and pour it into the vase. Jump down the shoot. Jump and grab onto the pole. Be careful with the stabbing blades! If Lara is close to full health she will survive the fall if you let go and grab right before the blades.

Repeat for the second and third rooms, combining the waterbags to yield the corresponding number of water symbols for each room. After solving the puzzle for the third room, climb two levels down the shaft with the light blue light beam, past the black and gold floorgate. Then shimmy to the right into the platform.

At the platform, run and jump north in the water below. Lara must land in water or she won't make it. Make sure to use the look button to line up the jump correctly. Otherwise she might hit the ceiling and land on the rocks. We don't want that!

Once in the water, swim up to the middle island and place the four statues in the inventory in the pillars that surround the altar. Walk into the light.



TEMPLE OF HORUS: Notice the symbols on the wall and use them to figure out the amount of water needed to open the right gate.

Temple of Horus 2

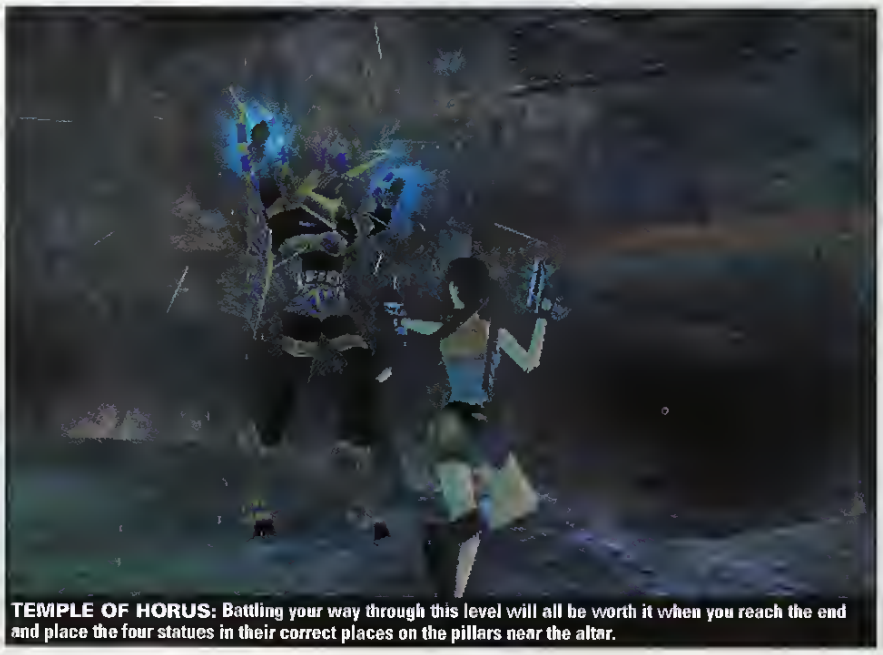
Quickly jump into the water to avoid the boss's heavy attacks. Swim around and look for the Amulet of Horus that fell into the water.

There are two rooms in the periphery. Picking up the amulet opens the door to the one to the south. Swim to the corresponding ledge and go into the room and hit the switch that opens the door to the second room to the north. You will not be able to defeat the boss by firing; the goal is to get out of the room alive as he bombards Lara with fire. Move fast and don't stay in the same place for too long — you will need plenty of health packs otherwise. By the way, the first shot Lara takes from the boss will set her on fire, so be prepared to jump into the water immediately. His projectiles do not harm Lara if she is standing in the blue beam in the middle of the room, but that is small comfort.

Go back in the water and swim to the ledge that leads to the second room, then hit the switch. Now it's time to swim to the ledge that leads to the entrance of the first room and walk east to the ledge. Run and jump across and begin to climb quickly and accurately around the various ledges around the periphery. All jumps are of the run-and-jump variety and one will require Lara to crawl, providing a few seconds of cover.

Once out of the crawl position, follow the ledge and run, jump, and grab. Now facing north, run, jump, and grab onto the gold wall with the pigface texture. Shimmy toward the beam and up. Face the west and climb all the way up until a cut scene appears.

Go up the hallway to the east but beware of the traps, the first of which is a set of three sliding pillars. Head toward the ledge on the left and run-jump-greb over the spikes. Jump end grab across the next few chasms, and your adventure is complete! PCG



TEMPLE OF HORUS: Battling your way through this level will all be worth it when you reach the end and place the four statues in their correct places on the pillars near the altar.

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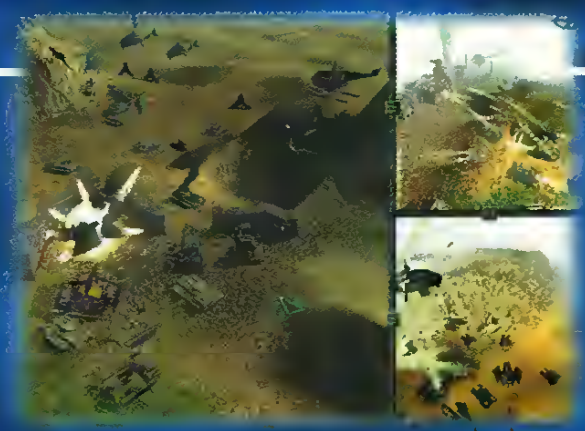




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Asheron's Call

So, you've just started your alternative life in the world of *Asheron's Call*, but you're still not quite sure what to do and where to go — we've got you covered, friend! This guide, written by the helpful folks from developer Turbine, should assist newer players with learning some of the game's ins and outs, and includes many handy tips that will help you along in your quest for glory. Before long, you'll be lording it over your fellow adventurers, demanding fealty from the unwashed masses. And isn't that what gaming's all about?

Creating Your Character

Once you become familiar with the play mechanics of *Asheron's Call* you cen start to get more creative with the types of characters you pley. When starting out, though, your best bet is to create a fighter type end specialize in unermed combat. As for your race, the Sho is an excellent choice; they get unarmed combat as a bonus skill, which gives you a leg up on the competition. Outfit yourself from head to toe with as much clothing as possible. While it doesn't really help armor levels, it can be sold in town for a little bit of coin that can help out early in the game.

Why choose unarmed combat as a specialty? Well, when you die in *Asheron's Call*, you lose some money, a couple of items, and receive a temporary reduction in your skills and attributes. By focusing on unarmed combat, even if you lose ell your weapons, you're still dangerous and able to defend yourself. As a bonus, it makes it easier to get your corpse back as well!

There are two standard approeches to creating an unarmed combatant. One is to create them like a warrior, end the other like a blademaster. Neither of these seems to work very well without some major adjustments. Warriors are too general, expending attribute points evenly, which won't help you out all that much early in the game. Blademasters tend to skimp on endurance, and still weste points on focus and self.

Early on in the game, specialization is the key. Don't try to be a warrior who debbles in magic and cooking. Stick to one thing and one thing only for the first half-dozen levels or so. After that, you can stert thinking about what other skills you want to add to your repertoire — and about that time you'll find that you should heve enough training credits to boost e skill up.

For an unermed fighter, the ideal attribute settings are as follows because coordination is the most important attribute to an unarmed fighter, followed closely by quickness and strength. But, since this character will almost always be toe to toe with opponents, endurance should be boosted instead. Focus end Self are needed later on to help manipulate magicel items or pick locks effectively, but they ere not important et lower levels.



When first starting out, your best bet is to choose a fighter that has the ability to fight unarmed.

Strength	70
Endurance	80
Coordination	90
Quickness	70
Focus	10
Self	10

Flipping back and forth between skill selection and attributes will show the effect of changing any one attribute on the character's overall proficiency. A good selection of specialized skills would include Unarmed Combat, Melee Defense, and Healing. This character is going to get hurt a lot and will need all the help he or she can get. Trained skills should include Magic Defense, Missile Defense, Jump, Loyelty, Run, Appraise Item, and Arcene Lore.

Because the character doesn't rely on buying weapons constantly, the Appraise Weapon skill wasn't trained. Concentrate on reising health and missile defense with any experience points



When creating your character, remember that the most important thing to consider is what to skill to focus on. Having a very diverse set of skills may sound good, but you'll live longer by specializing.



The town of Shoushi is an excellent place to begin your adventuring career, as it has many shops and a local hunting ground.

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(XP) that you earn. Unarmed Combat, Melee Defense, and Healing should increase pretty quickly on their own since they're the three skills you'll be using the most often.

Where Do I Go From Here? (Your First Quest)

When first entering the world, you'll be instructed to go through the training hall to learn about the basic game mechanics. Note that in the fighting area, you actually earn XP for killing the straw dummies. While not the fastest way to gain experience (at only two to three points per dummy), it can give you a bit of a head start. At the end of the training hall, you'll exchange the gem in your inventory for a healing tonic. Hold on to it. If you don't have healing kits, it's your only way to gain some fast health.

Shoushi is one of the better towns to start near. There are plenty of people there at all hours of the day and night, a variety of shopkeepers, and good hunting grounds nearby. Overall, it's a perfect location for both new and experienced players.

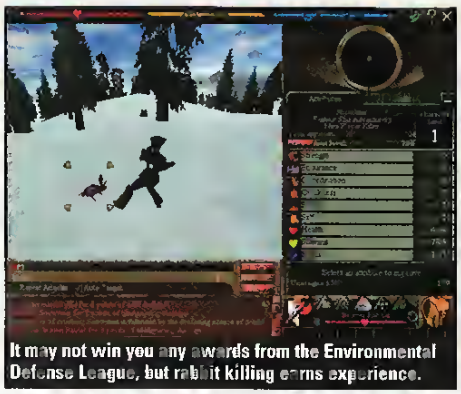
Upon leaving the training dungeon, go buy some armor or weapons. You've only got 100 pyreal (dollars) to spend, so you won't have a lot of options. The clothes on your back aren't enough to make much of a difference now, so you may as well keep them until you find that you're just a few pyreal short of something you really need.

Since the character you've created has specialized in unarmed combat, Studded Leather Gloves are a worthwhile purchase from the armory in town. Not only do they add some protection, but the better your gloves the more damage you'll do. Don't bother upgrading your gloves until you can afford plate mail gloves; scale and chain mail gloves don't give you any attack improvements over the studded leather ones.

Now go back and hand your welcome letter to the non-player character at the training hall (the dot for this person on your radar is yellow, and he'll ask for the letter when you strike up a conversation). Now you're on your first quest. Follow the instructions and head west to retrieve the yaoji.



The training hall will teach you the basic skills you need to survive in Dereth. You can kill the straw dummies for a few experience points



It may not win you any awards from the Environmental Defense League, but rabbit killing earns experience.

Along the way, you'll probably run across some harmless rabbits foraging in the woods. As a level one player, you may as well practice your attacks on them. They won't give you much XP (about 10), but every little bit helps right now. You'll gain far more attacking creatures that fight back — the more powerful, the more you gain, but it's also riskier. Attacking bunnies does put you at odds with the Dereth Environmental Defense League (yes, the group actually exists — they're sort of an *Asheron's Call* version of Greenpeace).

When you first spot enemies (shown as orange dots on your radar), it's best to check your map location. Click on the map arrows next to your inventory bag, and then write down where you are. If you die, those coordinates will help in the recovery of your body — and whatever loot you may have lost! Next, evaluate your enemies. Double click on them to see their stats, or click on them, and then select the magnifying glass to the right of your backpack. This should give you a pretty good indication of whether or not you can take on the creature and have a chance of survival. It's not recommended that you try to take on anything above level four or five until you're pretty confident in your abilities and have fought a number of lower level creatures.

After your first quest, if you haven't already reached level two, then hang out in that area and scout for more low-level creatures to battle. Don't forget to examine the corpses of anything you find! Although the few pyreals you find on low-level creatures isn't much, grabbing the weapons, food, herbs, or gems they're carrying will add up once you start selling the loot back in town. Only if you're encumbered and still in any danger, should you start dropping stuff. Eat or drop food first, then herbs, and then weapons and armor. Appraise items before dropping them, as there may be something special that you picked up without even realizing its value.

Battling the Beasts of Dereth

At lower levels, you'll be facing a few different types of enemies — Drudges (Slinkers, Skulkers, and Prowlers), Gnawers, Shreths, Rats, and the occasional Wasp. For Drudges, you'll probably encounter small bands of two or three at a time. Skulkers (level two creatures) in bands of two or three are pretty easy to take care of without much of a problem (they're the white ones). Position yourself with your back to a wall or tree so they can't surround you. You'll take less damage, and be able to finish them off quicker. If you've got a



The Drudge family of monsters come in many shapes and sizes, but even low level characters should be able to handle two or three monsters at a time. Here we see some Skulkers that should have picked another foe.

Nekode, use it; Drudges have terrible resistance to slashing weapons. Attacking them anywhere is usually enough to get the job done, but medium and low are the best places to do the most damage. Aim high and you'll usually miss.

Prowlers (level four creatures) pose a bit more of a problem for you at this early stage of the game, especially when there is more than one attacking you. If there are any that are throwing weapons at you (daggers, darts, or javelins) or shooting you with arrows, take care of them first! Your Missile Defense skill is much lower than your Melee Defense skill and you'll take more damage from missiles than from being punched or clawed. Next, eliminate any Drudge attacking you with a weapon. Last, turn your attention to the unarmed opponents.

Gnawer Shreths are the weakest of the Shreth family on Dereth. They may look menacing and sound ferocious, but they're pretty easy to defeat. Rather than going at them with a weapon, just use your hands or a Cestus, since they're pretty weak against bludgeoning attacks. Hit them low, just like the Drudges and they'll fall pretty quickly.

Adjusting speed is important! Fast jabs can often do more damage in a shorter amount of time than slow, full-powered swings. Low power attacks can even keep going efter you're out of stamina. Of course you don't evade the monsters attacks as well without stamina so keep an eye on your health.

Rats are pretty easy to battle, but remember to aim low! Use quick ettacks on them to keep them off balance and you should be able to kill them with just a few swipes.

Wasps, on the other hand, demand that you aim high since they're always flying around. Wasps occasionally will cast some magic spells on you as their mode of attack; if your magic defense is low, watch out!

One of the best things about these creatures, with the exception of the Shreths, is that occesionally they'll reward you with a souvenir of your encounter. A Drudge charm, a rat tail, or a wasp wing are all great finds for lower level players. There ere collectors in most towns that will buy these from you for upwards of 50 pyreals! That's e heck of e lot better than just getting two or three pyreals and a loaf of bread from a dead Drudge.

When fighting, start with the festest punches and kicks possible, frequently removing small numbers of hit points. This strategy uses stemina es efficiently as possible. Every few rounds you should power up your attack until the ber reaches its maximum. This gives a boosted hand combat or kick ettack, and is very effective. It works wonders against skeletons or other brittle creatures (who, es you may imagine, are susceptible to bludgeoning attacks).

If the creature is prone to piercing attacks, use a Katar. If they take blunt damage easily, use a Cestus. For sleshing, use a Nekode. They're sold throughout Dereth, but are heritage group specific, so you'll need to hunt around until you find the one(s) you want. They're always useful to have since they add 4 percent to your Melee Defense skill, which at lower levels is a pretty significant bonus!

Adventurer Heal Thyself

During these first few quests, most of your opponents won't have many thrown weapons or magical attacks, so you should be able to outrun them if your health starts dropping dangerously low. You'll see a lot of people in Dereth laying down in an effort to regain health quicker. Laugh at them (emote: *laugh). Sitting down, by pressing the G key, regains your health just as quickly as laying down, and it doesn't take as long to get into combat mode if a creature suddenly appears in front of you; not to mention the fact that you also won't look as silly as those lounging about.

If you didn't pick healing during character generation, bump it up to Trained as soon as you can, which will be level seven if you don't spend your training points before that. For the first few levels that you've got healing, use only crude healing kits; they cost a fifth or less of the other quality levels. You'll still have to run away from creatures to use them, and they'll take more time to heal you, but you'll be using the healing skill and increasing your proficiency in the process.



The ability to heal yourself comes in pretty handy at any level, and should be e consideretion when creeting your character. You'll get better as you use the skill.

A Few Final Thoughts

Carry a piece of parchment or two with you at all times. Use one for listing portel locations in the world, and the other for dungeon entrances, or quest clues that you get. It's incredibly easy to forget what you need to do, or where you need to go if you log out for a day or two.

By following the above tips, you should have no problem getting through the first couple of quests you embark upon. If you really want to start exploring the social aspect of the game (which is why you're playing online, after all), then hang out in a nearby town or near the treining dungeon. Approach people and see if they're interested in going on a quest with you. Allying yourself casually, or in a fellowship, is a great way to experience Dereth, while minimizing your chances of getting overwhelmed in a dungeon and killed. It's recommended that you avoid joining an allegiance for your first few levels — you need time to see what the benefits of different allegiences are, and which one suits your style. Most of all, you need the time to get familiar with your character and Dereth. Happy hunting!

PCG



It's eesy to lose your piece, especielly if you spend some time awey from the geme. Meke sure you heve some parchment on hand to keep track of where you've been and where you went to go.

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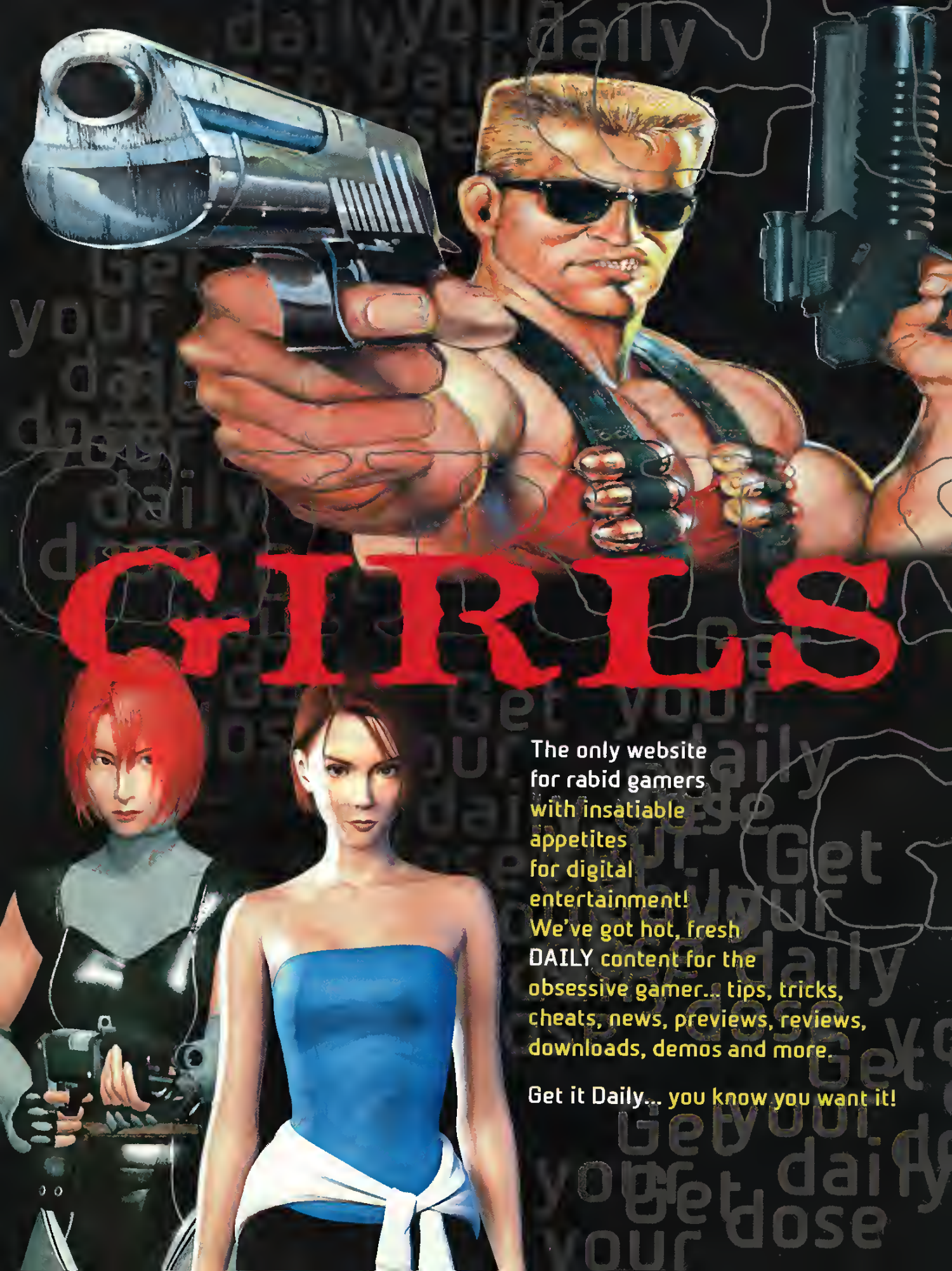


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What's Up With Co-op?

I buy and read your magazine mainly to get info on the multiplayer aspects of a game. I have LAN parties with family and friends a few times a year and for a game to make it to our parties it must have cooperative play.

Your review in the December 1999 issue of *Homeworld* left me wondering if the game had co-op or not. You wrote: "The basic multiplayer structure, however, is a defend base/harvest/kill-everyone style of play". What does that tell me about co-op, CTF, or Team play? This is just one example of many vague multiplayer reviews.

Please try and include all of the different forms of multiplayer features in your future reviews. It would really help us out.

—Stryc, *via the Internet*

We always try and let our readers know when a game has more than the standard one-on-one or deathmatch form of multiplayer. Unfortunately, we don't have the space to tell you about all the things that aren't in the game, so if we don't mention a multiplayer option, you can be pretty sure it's not a part of the package. As for Homeworld, *there is no cooperative play mode.*

Mod Making 101

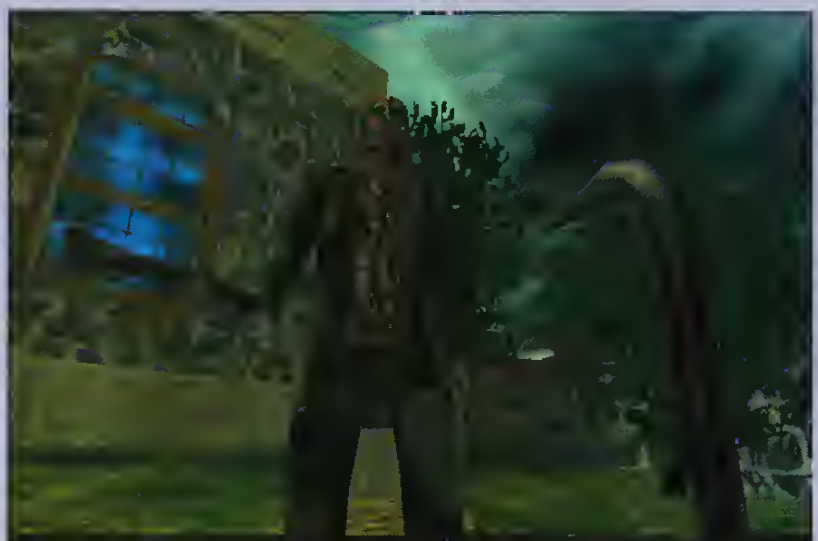
After playing and thoroughly enjoying *They Hunger*, the *Half-Life* mod included on the February CD, I felt somewhat inspired to attempt to create my own. It may seem like a simple question with a not-so-simple answer, but perhaps you could clarify the process for me, many other readers, and amateur designers as well. Can you do a story about how to create a mod, and what tools and/or software are needed?

—Adam Fisher, *via the Internet*

We've been tossing this idea around for a while, Adam, but we aren't sure if it would appeal to a large enough group of our readership. If a feature on Mod design is something you'd like to see, drop us a note. We'll see if we can get Neil Manke to pass on some of his expertise to his many fans

Mahood to the Rescue

In Andy Mahood's review of *MiG Alley*, he reports that there's a feature that allows you to import your own nose art.



Would you be interested in a *PC Gamer* feature on how to create your own deathmatch levels and total conversions like Neil Manke's brilliant *Half-Life* TC *They Hunger*? If so, write and let us know!



Want the details on how to customize your plane in *MiG Alley*? It's easy if you know where to look!

He says, "Check the online manual for details..." Huh? No one I know can find details on this. If you can help out, I'd much appreciate it.

—KingLear71, *via the Internet*

Never fear, KingLeer...Andy-on-the-spot has the answer for you:

1. Start a new campaign (this is the only place where you have full control over the planes and squadrons).

2. Click on the "Squadrons" button at the top of the mission-planning screen when you get your first mission. This brings up a new dialog box.

3. Click on the box with your name on it. This brings up a "Flight Details" box.

4. Click on the "aircraft" tab.

5. Click on any of the existing nose art selections. This brings up the Paint Shop dialog box.

6. Click on the Question mark (?) in the upper right corner to access the help file for this utility.

Better Late than Never

Before I start, I just want to say that your magazine is the greatest. The reviews help me weed out all the bad games so I don't buy them. Anyway, I just wanted to say something. I received the February issue of your fine publication, but I noticed something quite odd. In your January 2000 issue, it says that the next issue will be all about upcoming online games. Obviously, when I looked at the February issue, it was mostly about *Team Fortress 2*. The February issue was also supposed to contain a "world exclusive on *Ultima Online 2*", and it did not.

What gives? Where's this world exclusive? There is no mention of it anywhere in the February or even in the upcoming March edition. Please clear this up for me, as I was hoping to find out more information of these upcoming games. Thanks.

—Trevor Soule, *via the Internet*

Sorry about that Trevor (and everyone else that was looking forward to this feature). Since we have to write that "Coming Next Issue" section pretty far in advance of the next issue, there are times when what we expect to happen just doesn't. In this case, Origin wasn't ready to unveil Ultima Online 2 *just yet, so we decided to hold off the entire feature until a later date. It looks like it will run in either the April or May issue at this point.* PCG

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READERS RESPOND TO:

WOMEN ON GAMING

In our January 2000 issue, we ran a letter written by Christine Nice lamenting the fact that women are sometimes discouraged from entering the male-dominated world of gaming. We asked our female readership to write in and give us their thoughts on the subject — here's a sample of the responses we received.

I'm a 36-year-old wife and mother. My favorite day of the month is when my *PC Gamer* arrives! My husband knows better than to break that sacred protective plastic wrapper

Anyway, I started playing video games more than 20 years ago (*Galaga, Space Invaders, Pac-Man*, pinball, etc.) Granted, I wasn't very good at any of them, but I loved them nonetheless. A few years ago I discovered *Quake*, what an invigorating experience! Blood, guts, gore! I was hooked. The day I brought it home, I forgot to feed my family, take out tha dog, etc. I patiently awaited the arrival of *Quake II*, and now I am playing *Quake III*. I have yet to venture out into a multiplayer setting, but I'll get there someday!

As for my parents nurturing my love of gaming, they weren't really aware of it Back then we didn't have home computers, or the games available today. Trust me, women are into gaming just as much as men are — we just keep it to ourselves (try bringing *Quake* into a conversation when everyone else is talking recipes!). I get some strange looks when I describe the characters, the weapons (I love the BFG) and the general rush of adrenaline associated with the game.

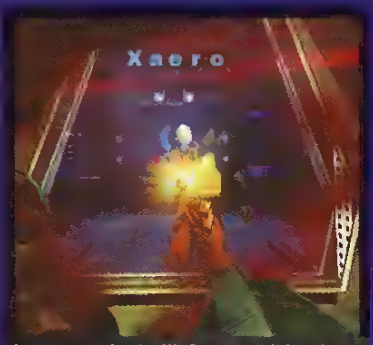
—**Puss in Boots**, *via the Internet*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

I'm thankful my parents never discouraged me from playing games when I was growing up. My sistar and I started with tha old Atari systam with *Pitfall, Frogger*, and *Donkey Kong*. Of course, whenever we could hit the arcade we did — *Defender, Galaxian*, and *Centipede* were my favorites and I could beat any boy who wanted to challenge me. My mother would even give it a go once in awhile and still does occasionally

Now as an adult, I hear acquaintances talk about gatting this game or that game for their boys, but never for their girls. It does seem that society has deemed gaming as a "boys only" hobby I get strange looks from male coworkers when I join in on their conversation about *Diablo, Final Fantasy VII, Dungeon Keeper* or *Doom*. The usual response is that I must be watching my husband play. Nope. I've played 'em and finished 'em and played 'em again Imagine their surprise when I gave them advice on how to get through a particular part of the game they couldn't figure out!

We have two daughters, ages nine and sevan, and we have never discouragad them from playing games. Our nine-year-old is quite interested in *Final Fantasy VII* and some of our



Gamas like *Quake III: Arena* aren't just for males; the naxt time you go onlina and get fragged, it may just be by a 36-year-old wife and mother named Puss in Boots!

other roleplaying gamas. Sha also reads your magazine whenever she can steal it away from her dad or I. She does put up with a lot of ribbing from the boys in her class about being weird for liking computer games, but she doesn't let it stop her from having fun. I've always felt gaming is for everyone, no matter what gender or age, and I hope my girls continue to enjoy it I know I certainly will

—**Wendy Hanson**, *via the Internet*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

My parants never discouraged me from playing video games (aside from the usual finish-your-homework-first line). In fact, when my family was stationed overseas, my father, a Lt Colonal in the U S. Army, never failed to return home from a trip without a new and exciting Atari game!

My gaming hobby took off when I met my husband-to-be After meeting in 1991 at the tender ages of 14 and 16, we became passionetely involved ...in the pleasures of gaming. Our relationship has survived numerous stormy battles of *Doom, Quake, Jedi Knight, Blood*, and *Unreal Tournament*

The truth, as was so eloquently stated by Christine Nice in the January issue of *PC Gamer*, is — sometimes girls just like to kill things!

—**Jody Madeira**, *via the Internet*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Christine Nice's letter and your response asking about how women came to be gamers hit a chord with me I'm a 45-yeer-old mother of a teenage son. Games have always been a part of my life So has fantasy and science fiction

My first encounter with electronic gaming started with *Pac-Man*, playing it at the pizza parlor while waiting for my order to be raady. My son is just turning 17 and we started out with console games when he was three years old, sitting and playing together We graduatad to computer roleplaying games in 1994 when it took both of us to figure out how to play a bunch of early AD&D games. Since then we have acquirad a second computer and our gaming has turnad into a competition to finish first and best

I suppose I was naturally attracted to action and adventure games because I grew up as an incorrigible tomboy. When I asked for a GI Joe, my mother bought ma a Barbie. I solved that problem by playing wargames with the Barbies (to the horror of the neighborhood girls and their mothars).

I have changed very little since then and am frequently the only female down at the local game stora. This Christmas, the only things under the tree were PC games of various sorts.

—**Janrae Frank**, *via the Internet*

■ ■ ■ ■ ■

> When I asked for a GI Joe my mother bought me a Barbie. I solved that problem by playing wargames with the Barbies

My enjoyment of video games started beck when I was very young. If it were not for my two older brothers, I probably never would have started. As a young child, I would always spend my Saturdays watching them play e variety of games. From this, I learned how much fun I could have with games, even though they would raraly let me play with them because I was "just a girl." Now, a bit more mature in life, I still find time for video games.

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—**Bethany**, via the Internet

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***He's the frustratingly young design genius behind* Homeworld, PC Gamer's Game of the Year! He's tall! He's fun at parties! And wouldn't you know it, he's Canadian! Ladies and germs, gather round and ask what you will of...**

ALEX GARDEN

How the devil are you?
Everything's fine, situation normal. How are you? Just a slight weapons malfunction. Negative, negative we've got a reactor leak here. Large leak, very dangerous. Er...

What was the first game you ever played?
Pong, but the first one I really fell in love with was the original *Legend of Zelda* for the 8-bit NES.

How did you get into the games industry?
Working at Distinctive Software here in Vancouver when I was about 16. I was lucky enough to meet some great people that have helped me a great deal getting started and learning what great games are all about

What's the worst game you've ever been involved in making?
I think the game that disappointed me the most was *The Divide: Enemies Within*. It had a cool design, and a strong team, but for some reason, the parts didn't gel and a lot of great individual work came together into a lackluster end product. A real shame.

What's the last game you've played recently?
Without question, *Half-Life Opposing Force*. I just can't get enough of the *Half-Life* universe. I'm also having a blast with *Unreal Tournament*.

And the worst?
Pong 3D. I'm sorry. I hate myself for slagging this product, but for God's sake, talk about cashing in on a title. There was so much they could have done with that license.

What's the greatest moment in the history of gaming?
For me, it was shipping *Homeworld*, but objectively I think the greatest moment was the first time anyone saw *Wolfenstein 3D*. That title forever changed the way we looked at PC gaming. We realized that there was an infinite world of possibilities as long as we were prepared to accept that everything was possible.

Have you ever been arrested?
No, but the manhunt continues.

What era you like when you're drunk?
I'm like Gary Whitta, but drier. Plus, I shy away from snorting unknown liquids up my nose.

If there was one thing about the games business that you could smite with one mighty blow?
I'm inclined to say John Romero's hair, but that would just piss him off, so instead I'll say "scrod." Those slippery little bastards are bad news.

What's your favorite Hostess product?
Ding Dongs. I don't know what it is about 'em, but if I ever decide to grow huge sideburns, move to Memphis and sequester myself in the bathroom in a sequined robe, I'm going to want a lifetime supply of Ding Dongs.

"If I ever decide to move to Memphis and sequester myself in the bathroom, I'm going to want a lifetime supply of Ding Dongs."



What are you most likely to complain about in a hotel?
Nothing pisses me off more than to arrive in my room and find a luggage cart in my bed. I *hate* that.

Violence in gaming: legitimate concern or media hysteria?
Media hysteria, no question. It's time to take a look closer to home before we condemn violence in games.

Pick five words to describe yourself.
Buddha said, "What isn't enlightenment?".

What do you have in your pockets right now?
Keys, my wallet. Oh, and the design overview for our two new titles.

What's your most unpleasant characteristic?
My tendency to emotionally over-react to people who don't agree with me. I'm working on it.

What music do you want played at your funeral?
New Orleans Jazz. They have the best funerals in New Orleans.

Online gaming: over-rated fad or inevitable future?
Both. The urge to play in a community setting is a more powerful impulse than the urge to play alone. I'm just dreading all the mistakes I'm going to make while learning how to make online games.

What game do you wish somebody would make?
I really, really, really, want to see a sequel to the brilliant Commodore 64 game *Neuromancer* by William Gibson. One of the best games ever.

Where are you off to now?
Lunch. Then some shopping. Then I'm going to go home and play *Unreal Tournament* 'till my eyes cross and I pass out drooling on my keyboard. Ah, the non-stop excitement that is the life of a game designer.

PCG

PC GAMER
MARCH 2000

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It was a balmy, sultry evening. Catherine phoned to let me know I would spend the evening alone. She meant forever.

Perhaps I showed her the book prematurely. The photos were from a time I had long forgotten, and she was not ready to discover. Those innocent Barbie dolls. The frayed lines of twine. How long had they been left? Alone. Betrayed. To decompose.

Truly, I was a different person. Young, misunderstood. But not uncompassionate.

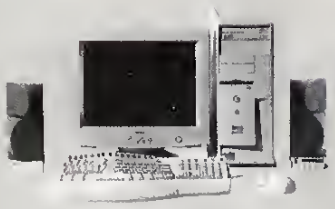
The phone rang again. Perhaps it was my anxiety attack, but it didn't sound like Catherine. The voice was a slow, drowned anonymous whisper. It was encouraging.

They say you can't kill with a Swiss Army Knife. Too flimsy. But I think some know otherwise. Those who know forever is too long.

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